

PAPERS FROM THE



**WOMEN'S
LIBERATION
& SOCIALISM
CONFERENCE**

London 22/23 September 1973

25p

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* Several of the contributions were from Red Rag, nos. 4 and 5 (for details see list of workshop topics and papers, p.vii). These are not reprinted here but copies of the paper, price 10p. (subscription 50p.) are obtainable from 9 Stratford Villas, London N.W.1.

** This is a statement of the main points from a longer paper published separately as 'The Politics of Sexuality under Capitalism', Red Collective Pamphlet No. 1., which is obtainable from Flat 6, 104 Greencroft Gardens, London N.W.6. (price 15p. ; 20p. incl. postage).

FOREWORD

The second conference on Women's Liberation and Socialism was held on 22 and 23 September 1973 at Conway Hall in London. It was decided at the conference that we, the Planning group, should publish the papers of the conference and the reports on the workshops. This collection includes all the papers on which that conference was based with the exception of contributions from Red Rag (see note on the Contents page) and all the workshop reports that were received, though unfortunately these do not cover all the workshops.

We also felt, however, the need to discuss the conference and its organisation, and to write down some thoughts on its politics and significance. We have therefore included reports and discussions of the tasks which went into the organisation of the conference. We realised before the conference that some of the issues raised during the organisation period were of wider significance - in some cases for Women's Liberation and Socialism conferences, in others for the politics of Women's Liberation Movement conferences in general. We wrote a paper on this and attempted to discuss it at the Saturday night 'open session'. This paper, and some of our thoughts on the discussion of that evening are included here in an attempt to start a longer term debate on the possibilities, purpose and problems of conferences. We also felt it important that the task reports be published not only to help in a 'practical' way those who may be involved in planning similar conferences but also for those who may never be, so that they can 'see' conferences as a total process. It seems to us within the Women's Liberation Movement there is a dearth of records of people's experiences on actual projects and the problems they face.

We probably felt that our most positive contribution to this longer-term development of conference politics lay in our attempts to develop new structures for workshops. Although problems remain, the effort to structure subject areas, not to rely too centrally on papers and to have discussion leaders who were 'well-prepared' seem to have been valuable initiatives. We also feel that it is vital that papers should be circulated and read beforehand in the context of a broader political preparation.

More particular to Women's Liberation and Socialism conferences was the problem of structuring the conference as a body. There seemed to be a demand for a structure without a real desire to discuss why a structure was necessary and what it could represent. The 'Saturday night paper' discusses some of the problems we felt to be central to this issue.

In London we are now having regular one-day meetings to discuss papers which it has not been possible to tackle at larger conferences. We also hope to hold discussions around the work of various local women's liberation groups to strengthen regional links with women working on similar projects and to prepare ourselves politically for future conferences.

The Planning Group of the Conference.

The second conference on Women's Liberation and Socialism was held on 25 and 26 September 1973 at Conway Hall in London. It was decided at the conference that the Planning Group, should publish the papers of the conference and the reports on the workshops. This collection includes all the papers on which the conference was based with the exception of contributions from the notes on the conference (and all the workshop reports that were received, though unfortunately these do not cover all the workshops).

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In London we are now having regular two-day meetings to discuss papers which it has not been possible to include at larger conferences. We also hope to hold discussions around the work of various local women's liberation groups to strengthen regional links with women working on similar projects and to prepare ourselves politically for future conferences.

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London, W.C.1.

September 22-23, 1973, Starting 10.00 a.m.

REVISED AGENDA AND INFORMATION SHEET

AGENDA

Saturday	10.00 - 10.30	Introduction, information
	10.30 - 1.00	Workshops - History of W.L.M.
	1.00 - 2.30	Lunch
	2.30 - 5.00	Workshops - Campaigns and Demands
	5.00 - 6.30	Supper
	6.30 - 8.00	Open Session
	8.00 - 10.00	Social - Women's Disco
	10.00 - 11.00	(a cleaning-up extension has been obtained!)
Sunday	10.00 - 1.00	Workshops - Autonomy of the Women's Movement
	1.00 - 2.30	Lunch
	2.30 - 5.00	General Meeting. End of Conference.

POINTS OF INFORMATION

ACCOMMODATION Those needing accommodation on Friday night ring Penny Wooley on arrival (01) 586-3432. Where possible accommodation will be provided in people's homes, but bring sleeping bags.

London women offering accommodation, please ring Penny: 586-3432.

REGISTRATION Registration will begin at Conway Hall at 9.00 a.m., Saturday. Please come early to register as the building is complicated. Registration fee is £1.00 per person, food not included. Those who have registered before hand - papers so far available are enclosed.

THE WORKSHOPS We are trying a new approach in organising workshops. A group of London sisters have met and divided up each workshop session into six workshops on the basis of specific topics, and papers/notes received. They will prepare an introduction, questions verbal or written to provide the focus/starting point for each workshop. Thus we hope to deal with the wide spectrum of subject matter, to ensure specific questions and papers get the attention they deserve, and prevent a rigid exchange of a couple of points in one or two papers, thus freeing those having written papers to participate in discussion and not dictate it. The details of the sub-headings of workshop groups will be published at the Conference.

THE OPEN SESSION Saturday night.

We, the planners of this Conference, feel that an informal open discussion by all participants on the aims and object of this Conference and the significance of Marxist women getting together, is a vital issue. This will provide a firmer base for the Sunday General Meeting, where conclusions of the Conference and proposals to it will be presented. The planning group will provide a short paper for the Saturday night discussion based on the political questions raised during the collective planning of this Conference. Themes emerging from the two previous workshops will provide historical and present "meat" to this discussion.

GENERAL MEETING Sunday 2.30 - 5.00

Summing up of the Conference based on the three workshops and the open session. Proposals to the Conference. The way forward.

FOOD Saturday and Sunday lunch only will be provided. Light packet lunch, due to lack of kitchens and distribution space; cost 30p (approx). Meal tickets for Saturday obtainable at registration table. On Sunday meal tickets at door in the morning. Tea and coffee available in the Small Hall on Saturday and Sunday a.m.;

cost 2p. Supper: nearby cafes and pubs have been warned! London people are urged to bring their own lunch if not eating out, and for those whose accommodation they are providing. Food will be limited, especially on Sunday as few public places will be open.

The creche will provide its own food.

BOOKSTALLS Priority of available facilities to those 1. participating in the Conference, selling material on Women, and 2. groups participating, but with more general material. Please let us know what you need beforehand. Ring Rob (01) 828-3735.

CRECHE Urgent: are we having no children? (Please, we must know, to provide facilities and food. Including ages of children.) Older children, five upwards, will be "shipped off" to the Children's Community Centre, Dartmouth Park Hill, N.19. Babies and toddlers' creche is in Conway Hall. Assemble with children by 9.00 a.m. at Conway Hall where transport is available. Ring Sally (01) 994-0551 or Diane (01) 485-3609.

PLEASE PASS THIS ON TO GROUPS YOU KNOW OF THAT HAVE NOT REGISTERED

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'WORKSHOP TOPICS'

All the papers and notes mentioned are reprinted in this collection with the exception of the articles from Red Rag (see note on Contents page).

History of the Women's Liberation Movement

1. Origins of the movement: a critical perspective.

Papers/Notes

Some notes on the history of the Movement
Class and the Women's Movement
A brief history of the Women's Liberation Workshop

2. History and critique of campaigns.

The Four Demands, where do we go now
Notes on the Night Cleaners
The Four Demands
Striking progress (Red Rag, No.5)
The patter of tiny contradictions (Red Rag, No.5)

3. From consciousness-raising to study group.

Class and the Women's Movement
The Study Process: A Women's Political (Marxist) Group

4. The political assumptions behind our methods of organisation, viz. Women's National Co-ordinating Committee, Women's Liberation Workshop, Information Centres, Women's Centres.

Class and the Women's Movement
Some notes on history of the Movement
A Brief History of the Women's Liberation Workshop
Moving on - organisation: notes from the U.S. (Red Rag, No.5)

5. Class and the Women's Movement: A discussion of opposing views on the evolution of the Women's Movement in relation to the class struggle

Class and the Women's Movement
Orientation of the Women's Liberation Movement: The two trends, bourgeois feminist and proletarian revolutionary

6. Ad hoc: to be available for discussions sisters would like to set up.

Campaigns and Demands

1. Politics of campaigns and demands in general.

Papers/Notes

A Sense of Liberation
Women and the Wage System
Fertility: Economics and Ideology

2. Fertility: Economics and Ideology.

Fertility: Economics and Ideology

3. The Exploitation of Women as Housewives.

Women and the Wage System
The Women's Liberation Movement and the present crisis of
British capitalism: a proposal for action
The Perspective of Wages for Housework
Wages for Housework: What it is based upon.

4. Economics of Equal Pay.

Papers/Notes

Notes on Equal Pay: the politics of Equal Pay

5. Women's Centres.

York Way Women's Centre: Why we quit Maiden Lane

6. Politics of Nursery Education.

Play Group Politics (Red Rag, No.5)

The patter of tiny contradictions (Red Rag, No.5)

Thatcher's Nurseries (Red Rag, No.4)

7. Ad hoc

Autonomy

It was found that "autonomy" was far more difficult to divide up into distinct topics than the others. Thus, it should be particularly borne in mind in this session that all papers will be relevant at least as background in each workshop, though in some cases, one paper may be more heavily emphasised.

Papers/Notes

1. Sexual Politics and the Autonomy of the Women's Movement
2. The Missing Link
3. Autonomy of the Women's Movement (Hackney Women's Group)
4. The Autonomy of the Women's Movement (IMG)
5. On Leaving IMG
6. Why there is a need for a separate but not autonomous Women's Movement
7. Orientation of the Women's Liberation Movement: The two trends, bourgeois feminist, proletarian revolutionary
8. Women and the Wage System

Workshops

1. The theoretical basis of organisational autonomy (emphasis paper 4)
2. Sexual politics and the autonomy of the Women's Movement (emphasis paper 1)
3. Women are oppressed along sex & class lines. How do we, in our organisation and tactics work with women in different economic classes?
4. Are 'feminist concepts' necessarily "idealist & bourgeois"?
5. The theoretical and practical aspects of autonomy within a socio-historical perspective, and with reference to structural changes, outside and within the movement as determinants of possible theoretical and organisational orientations over time.
6. The personal/sexual/collective politics of autonomy. Autonomy is a strategy; sexism is a materially based ideology and a practice. Thus, the strategy of autonomy derives from our notions of that ideology and practice. What then is sexism?

7. Ad hoc

FOR SATURDAY NIGHT OPEN SESSION

NEW QUESTIONS RAISED IN ORGANISING THIS CONFERENCE

The first conference, Women's Liberation and Socialism I, was called by a political study group in Birmingham. It arose out of an ongoing discussion amongst that group. It was the first such conference and thus the relationship between those who called it and those who came was largely undefined.

This London conference, on the other hand, came out of that specific meeting of women in the Women's Liberation Movement. What we inherited was a general perspective (e.g. discussing theoretical issues but with reference to concrete areas, largely the practice of the Women's Liberation Movement thus far), a specific agenda (the three areas), the time (which has been changed) and the place.

The open planning group which organised this conference came together only on that basis - to organise the conference - and had no previous experience of collective work as a group nor in some cases any previous contact. Thus, we went through a whole political experience together, getting to know each other and evolving a style of work, at the same time as we were planning the conference.

We were also faced with a different problem from the B'ham conference in relationship to the sisters who would come to this conference. Most of us felt, unconsciously perhaps, that we must each try to be representative both of the wishes (often contradictory) expressed at B'ham and of the different tendencies which might be represented at this conference. Each of us was trying to be "impartial", while in fact we were all more or less part of one or another tendency. We felt we ought to provide a space and structure wherein these diverse strands could at least meet. We felt we, as a group could not and some of us perhaps that we should not, work out a specific political orientation for the conference. (a more or less liberal tolerance).

A real problem we faced in trying to be "representative" was that many of the wishes and assumptions of those coming to this conference remained unknown because they had not been discussed as such.

At the beginning we tended to immerse ourselves in organisational tasks, without discussing the political basis for our activity. However, we came to realise slowly, and in the face of concrete problems and decisions, that the most seemingly simple 'decision' was based on certain political assumptions about the meaning and purpose of the conference, and that every decision and action was subject to different interpretations. Amongst ourselves, these questions and assumptions had to be articulated, unless we were to be simply bureaucratic. We honestly felt that such issues were not specific to this group planning this particular conference, but are and will continue to be issues of which we must all be conscious, unless we are merely to have activities for the sake of having them. It was for this reason that we felt that this Saturday night meeting should discuss them. There are differences amongst the planning group on these questions, and we don't expect to have agreed answers. Nonetheless, we felt it was urgent for all of us here to air and to become conscious of the different ways we all have come to understand our activities.

At different times, and in a slow uneven process, the following fundamental questions emerged as we confronted the problems of organising this conference:

- I. What do the Women's Liberation and Socialism Conferences signify in the History of the Women's Liberation Movement?
- II. Exactly whom should these conferences be for?
- III. What is their object?
- IV. The Politics of decision making.

I. What do the Women's Liberation and Socialism Conferences Signify in the History of the Women's Liberation Movement?

Much of the discussion in today's workshops will be extremely relevant to this question. Some feedback from the workshops will perhaps be essential to stop us all becoming extremely speculative.

Throughout the planning of this conference we became aware that we and many other sisters

were concerned to understand what this conference signifies in the history of the Women's Liberation Movement (without exaggerating its importance of course). One aspect of this was: what does it signify - (a) to those of us here; (b) to the 'movement' as a whole; (c) to those sisters in Women's Liberation who haven't come; (d) to sisters currently not in the movement; (e) to the 'left' in general.

The response amongst those who did attend the B'ham conference was largely one of enthusiasm, which seemed to indicate that a real need was felt by Women's Liberation sisters 'with a marxist orientation' to get together for theoretical discussion at the least.

To many of us it seemed that the conference was congruent and understandable as a manifestation of the same process that has been reflected in the past few years in the growth of political study groups in the Women's Liberation Movement, and in the development of the Red Rag collective. In any case, there seem to be several relevant trends developing in the Women's Liberation Movement. There are connections (difficult to assess) between the moment of the conference and these developments and those within the political situation in Britain in general - of which all of us should be conscious.

At the same time, there is a distinct difference between the theory and practice of women in the Women's Liberation Movement who have this "marxist orientation" (whether in left organisations or not) and that of women from left groups who have not had actual practice in the Women's Liberation Movement. What have been the effects on all of us here of our relationship to radical feminism and to the practice of small group consciousness raising?

Many of us felt a real need to evaluate what the mere fact of announcing a conference would mean to sisters in Women's Liberation who would not attend. At the first London planning meeting, much discussion centred around the timing of the conference, particularly around the pros and cons of having it before or after the Bristol Conference. The rest of the movement means nothing homogeneous. Within every tendency, such as radical feminism, etc., there are different trends. But amongst all groups, there could be suspicion as well as interest: some may view marxism as a monolith and think that all marxist women in WLM belong to one or another left organisation...a conference for the "men in drag". Some, because of their theoretical and practical position on principle do not participate. Others may be resentful; interested in finding out what "marxism" may have to say, they may feel (because of the way the conference has been formulated) that it is for those who "already are" marxists - suspicion of elitism.

What do these developments of which the conference may be part mean to sisters currently not in the movement? What do they mean in terms of our relationship to classes, groups of sisters whom we want to work with in our struggles? Do they make the movement more or less accessible or relevant?

What does it signify to the left organisations and to the left in general? With regard to left organisations - we are affected - e.g. does it alter their strategy towards us? What does it mean in the development of "socialist forces" in Britain?

All these questions seemed to be present in the background of writing announcements for newsletters, making the announcement at Bristol, responding to requests from individuals, groups and journals (Peace News, Institute of Workers Control, etc.).

We felt we were all individually coming to the point where we had to begin to define our politics, but positively, not merely as reaction. This does not mean that as a group we expected, or hoped for, this conference to define any coherent position, but rather that we should all work towards an understanding of the specificity of these politics.

II. Exactly whom should these conferences be for?

Confronted with the formulation to be put in the newsletters, to be announced at Bristol, we were faced with examining exactly whom these conferences are for. We were at pains to keep the title the same as the B'ham conference, Women's Liberation and Socialism. But as many of you know, the elaboration for publicity changed several times - for marxists and/or socialists in the WLM, for feminist marxists, for marxist women, for a discussion about the relationship between socialism and women's liberation, etc.

When we had to make the announcement at Bristol, some of the open planning group met with

other sisters and sisters from Bham to discuss how we understood the direction of the conference. We finally evolved "for women in the WLM with a marxist orientation". Obviously it was a question of emphasis rather than a question of exclusion. On the one hand, those who would come, would do so only on the basis of a "subjective self-definition" or interest, but at the same time we felt that the conference should come to terms with what was wanted as the object of the conference and whom it was and should be for.

In planning group meetings and larger London meetings, questions around the following sets of distinctions seemed to be paramount. One crucial distinction was made between a conference for marxists with a practice within WLM and a conference for individual women marxists. Should it be socialist or marxist? Another area of discussion was that while many felt the conference was primarily for productive discussion amongst marxist women in WLM, we should all be prepared to answer questions from non-Marxist sisters, without letting the conference become a "defense" of marxism: the distinction between a discussion about marxism and women's liberation and one within marxism and the women's liberation movement.

Discussion also developed around distinctions between those we dubbed "voyeurs" and those who, while not currently in the movement, might find the conference useful in making contacts, etc. We recognise how difficult it often is to break into the movement - closed groups, etc, but also realise that this is not a major function of this conference since discussion was largely about the practice of WLM. At the same time, we were wary of marxist women who have always stood outside the movement throwing critical remarks our way with no intention of actually working within the WLM.

These discussions came out of, and at the same time affected, questions such as the allocation of bookstalls, the possibility of being absolutely swamped with vast numbers that could not possibly be accommodated (a fear that soon gave way to the fear that only a small number would come!) and the format of the registration form. Originally, the registration forms were meant to have group/individual at the top, indicating the emphasis on actual practice in WLM but not implying an exclusion of individuals, but after a somewhat confusing discussion, it remained group.

These discussions were ongoing and inseparable from discussion about the object of the conference.

III. What is their object?

In developing the structure of the conference and providing for open sessions and workshops, and in attempting to cope with the agenda, we were faced with the question of how exactly we understood the object of these conferences. We hope that these points can help the conference expand the discussion on this question.

A. The following seemed to reflect the possible expected alternatives. That the conference represented:

1. Merely a place for theoretical exchange and contact - nothing else could/should develop out of this.
2. A route of discovery of the marxist theory of WL, the feminist marxism, or the marxist feminism.
3. An embryonic tendency within the WLM that should take on an organisational form, have activities.

B. Developing our practice

Some of us saw the conference as another crucial moment to use to build upon our experiences in the WLM: drawing from what we learn in consciousness-raising, coming to terms both with how and why we have rejected the practice of male-dominated groups and with the recognition of the problems of structurelessness. We hope to be constantly building upon the positive aspects of these experiences in developing a practice of women's politics.

This was very important in discussions about circulating papers beforehand, organising workshops, the structure of the open sessions - the whole structure of the conference. How have you felt about these things??

Obviously, these problems were also present in the practice of the open planning group.

C. Are conferences the best form to achieve whatever object you want?

Simply as a form, conferences represent a part of our political struggle against isolation. But are they the best/only form to achieve whatever we all see as our main object(s)?

IV The Politics of Decision-Making

A. Initial difficulties

We were faced with given initial difficulties of being an amorphous group - 'London' - and of having limited established means of communication - WLM newsletter and the International newsletter - neither of which had the space for detailed reports and requests.

In attempts at wider involvement of London sisters, efforts were also made early on to send short notes about meetings to London sisters of the B'ham list. As with the organisation of workshops, we continually wanted to involve as many women as possible in actual planning for the conference, but the steady group in fact reduced to some 15-20 women with a constant change-over of women at larger meetings. Expansion and involvement in planning tended to rely on an informal network of contacts when simple notices in the WLW seemed not to work; some London WLW groups found they had over-extended themselves in their commitments to planning work.

Perhaps this was due to in part the initial "bureaucratisation" of "tasks", which at the beginning tended to be one or two sisters doing each specific thing. But is there also a general reluctance to take part in planning and doing the mundane things that must be done?

Even within the steady 20, there was always the difficulty in resolving the contradiction between the attempt to function as a collective (while we were actually trying to evolve into one) and some necessary division of labour, i.e. each of us found it difficult to keep hold of everything that was going on. At different times, communication amongst ourselves didn't work and no one did one thing because we all thought someone else was doing it; different structures emerged and faded.

B. The general problem of 'representativeness'

We tended to make an all-out effort only to have large meetings (but not enough) to discuss explicitly political questions, e.g. the purpose of the conference, structure of open sessions and workshops, etc. We had difficulty in assessing the 'representativeness' of discussions and the status of decisions. We found ourselves often re-making decisions.

We found that the decision to exclude men from the conference at the initial London meeting was made easily and over-whelmingly, but with thoughtful discussion. On the other hand, feelings about decisions taken at B'ham varied. We did feel able to change the time after brief discussion of the politics and practicalities involved. At the same time, while many sisters felt there were problems with the agenda - both in terms of content and in the mere number of topics - we thought it would be undemocratic to change it, and even took pains to base the sub-headings on foggy memories of the discussion at B'ham. This, in spite of the fact that the agenda arose out of a rather ad hoc short discussion.

It was always difficult to assess how wide a consultation would be needed before taking any decisions finally, and how exactly to do it.

There were always problems of communication, especially with sisters outside London. It would have been ideal to send out reports but time and cost made this impossible. Perhaps we hoped for more of a response to the posted provisional agenda, schedule and pleas for papers than was possible.

There were reasons why these problems arose and we thought it important for all of us here to discuss them.

The open planning group has been through a lot of self-criticism on the way we worked and we all feel that we have learned an awful lot. We hope that raising these questions and problems can help in developing some productive criticism and ideas for the future.

PRACTICAL PLANNING REPORTS

AGENDA

The three main topics on the agenda (History, Campaigns and Demands, and Autonomy) were decided on at Birmingham, and although the decision had been hurried and ad hoc, we felt bound to stick to it. In the end, the schedule was too crowded, and this became a major factor in deciding to concentrate in the immediate future on single-topic conferences.

The "Provisional Agenda" was mailed nationally, but all the comments on it came from meetings in London. In the end, the provisional form for the three major sessions became the final form, admittedly rather arbitrarily. Throughout discussions of the agenda we were faced with problems of being 'representative' of Birmingham and yet allowing further discussion - and in the latter case it was always difficult to decide when a decision had really become 'final'.

Because we felt it was important to use Saturday evening in preparation for the plenary decision-making session on Sunday, there was no time for report-back sessions. Although not entirely happy with this decision, most of us felt that report-backs in themselves do not give a sense of coherence to a conference nor necessarily prove very informative. We thought it better to include written reports published along with the papers.

In general, it is questionable how useful the sub-topics were. Certainly they did not form clear lines for the production of papers. On the other hand, it is impossible to say whether or not they were useful in for instance group political preparation. And they certainly did not limit the production of papers.

The Saturday night open session did not actually deal with the questions we attempted to raise for discussion. This was at least partly due to the fact that sisters who had not been involved in the planning had not had to face them and were not therefore so concerned about them. It does seem that we should be more ready both to participate in dealing with such problems, to learn from the experiences of others and to communicate our own. Lastly, the general issue was raised of whether the planners should provide a more specific agenda for open sessions in general.

PAPERS

The first nationwide call for papers was mailed with the agenda, but produced no response. Due to lack of funds follow-up was necessarily limited and was mainly by exhortations at larger planning meetings, personal contacts, and letters to any sisters we heard might be writing papers. This system led to a bias towards London, and within London to a particular set of networks, something we were always conscious of and trying to avoid. The conviction that 'outside London' papers would arrive on the day was a major factor in the provision of 'open' workshops. But in the event these workshops were not used for this, and most of the papers were written by sisters in the London region.

It was decided early on that only papers which fell under one of the three main headings should be discussed in workshops, though others could of course be circulated at the Conference. Care was taken to make this clear, and also to stress that the sub-headings were 'indicative' only.

It was taken as a given, though questioned in discussion, for instance of the organisation of workshops, that the conference depended crucially on the production of papers. We therefore needed to know of papers well in advance, in order to organise workshops, and to circulate papers to all who registered in time.

Even after the posting deadline for this circulation had been postponed as long as possible, we had less than a fifth of the eventual total number of registrations and only a quarter of the papers. The late posting date meant that the papers reached sisters who had registered less than a week before the Conference. The meeting to arrange the workshops could take place only one week before: by that time we knew of the existence of all but one of the papers that were to appear (though two never did appear and one was in extremely short supply). Thus the preparation that all had felt to be very important was less than adequate.

Apart from calling for new papers, we also proposed that sisters write structured notes for discussion, but this form was eventually little used. There were also suggestions that more use should be made of existing papers, both because many have not been collectively discussed, and also to lessen dependence on the appearance of fresh papers and thus, in organisational terms, to make political preparation easier. Again, only notes from the Women's Liberation Workshop were re-printed.

DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS EXIST REGARDING THE ROLE OF PAPERS IN WORKSHOP DISCUSSIONS, AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH CONFERENCES SHOULD BE BASED ON THE PRODUCTION AND DISCUSSION OF PAPERS.

WORKSHOPS

We recognised early on the importance of evaluating our past experience with workshops, and attempting to build upon that. While ideas and plans developed unevenly, there was always opposition to any ideas of workshops as spontaneous 'happenings'.

General principles

1. Workshops were organised under each topic, on the basis of the important issues raised under each major heading and areas explored by the papers. A general subtopic, or question to be posed, was defined for each workshop. In most cases, one or more papers formed the basis for discussion, in others, there were no specific papers.
2. At least two sisters were to take responsibility for each workshop - chairing and providing verbal or written introductions, sets of questions or a proposed structure for discussion.
3. In general, if the authors of a paper were to be responsible for a workshop, this should be shared with someone not involved with the paper. It should not be assumed that authors should chair the workshops on their papers.

Concrete Plans

1. We called a meeting (advertised in the newsletter and informally through groups and contacts) a week before the conference. About 32 sisters came, and divided up into the three topic areas, with a member of the planning group as co-ordinator, to divide the topic up into six specific workshops. Since, as explained above, this meeting could not be called earlier, it was quite difficult for all the sisters in each group to read the papers (most then available, at least in summary form) for the first time, discuss the topic area, and divide up the papers in the short time available. Nevertheless, it was on the whole happily done.
2. There was general agreement to leave one workshop open under each topic for late papers, especially for those from outside London, and for uncovered topics; in the event, these workshops were not used in this way.

Problems

A. Before the Conference

1. Not all topics can be neatly divided up; in this case, we had problems with 'Autonomy'.
2. There are different experiences and understandings of "chairing"/taking responsibility for a small workshop. Our 'common practice' in the Women's Liberation Movement should not be taken as given, but should be worked on explicitly as part of the planning process.
3. We should have been clearer about the relationship between the planning group and the larger number of sisters organising workshops.

B. At the Conference

1. On account of the difficulty of estimating numbers, and the lack of suitable and available meeting-places, Conway Hall was inadequate. Most workshops were overcrowded, and in some it was very difficult to carry on any discussion.
2. There was one complaint that we had divided up into workshops at all. Some sisters felt there was too much structure, others too little. Some thought the programme confusing. But, despite specific requests at the open sessions it was difficult to get a sense of the general reaction.

3. The quality of the workshop discussions varied, and it was not easy to assess why. Size, access, nature of 'chairing', the topic itself- none seemed sufficient explanation. Occasionally, individual 'speech-making' not integral to the actual discussion became a problem.

General Conclusions

Looking back we now see some contradictions in our work:

1. On the one hand, we did not want the papers to dictate the discussion but to be dealt with within a framework. On the other hand, papers are part of an overall process of production of ideas, and therefore should not simply be used as raising certain points that can be pursued in isolation. Points may be raised in a way divorced from their context; and thus the paper as a whole, as the (unfinished) process of production of ideas, may never be dealt with.
2. This made us wonder whether there is a fundamental contradiction between the kind of papers generally produced for conferences and the structure within which they are discussed.
Is there a form in which papers as processes of production of ideas should be discussed?
Is there a type of paper that may be more useful for a given workshop structure?
Is there something "else" that should happen in workshops?
What must be taken as 'given' in organising workshop discussion at conferences?
What is the "space" provided in the workshop structure for?
Are there different needs that require a variety of structures?

DUPLICATING

Those of us who became involved in duplicating found out very quickly that it is essential for there to be at least one person who is experienced in duplicating. A set of written instructions was no adequate substitute for someone wholly familiar with a particular machine, especially if we were to minimize wastage of materials and avoid possible damage to equipment.

The planning group had made an early concrete decision to duplicate papers, already typed on skins, only from women whose prime commitment was to the Women's Liberation Movement, and to ask for contributions towards the cost of materials. In fact, such contributions did not materialize, and the cost was borne by the conference.

Few papers met the deadline set for receiving them, and the late ones comprised a considerable burden for those of us responsible for duplicating. Happily, however, we avoided individual drudgery by dealing with the work collectively, and this, in itself, contributed to a wider political experience that we all shared in the planning of the conference.

THE SOCIAL

In the absence of proper disco equipment, any record-player with a fairly powerful amplifier, and a selection of records for both listening and dancing (including some greats like Janis Joplin and Aretha Franklin) should be sufficient for a good bop. However, we were lucky in that the sisters who run the women-only discos at the Crown and Woolpack in Islington were prepared to bring their own equipment and records and take over. They might consider helping outside London - Contact Maria Walsh at the Crown and Woolpack, 394 St. John St., London E.C.1.

Drink: If drink is not allowed to be sold on the premises, bottles can be brought on an individual basis from the nearest pub, but remember to provide bottle-openers and cork-screws. This saves a lot of bother, but any profit goes to the pub. If student union bar facilities are being used, it's worth negotiating to see if you can get a cut of the profits. In other situations, if you have enough time (approx. one month's notice should be enough), and the energy to sell on the premises, contact the local brewery for a barrel/barrels, and you should get a good discount. But, you need capital and there is always the risk of not covering costs in the end.

FOOD

The problems of providing food at Conway Hall were increased by the lack of a proper kitchen and a room in which to serve it. (All rooms were occupied with workshops.) The food had therefore to be prepared elsewhere, packaged and brought to the hall, which created difficulties in transport and meant money had to be spent on packaging. Further problems were created by the lack of enough people to work on the preparation and serving of food.

Tips for those producing food for a conference:

1. Decide whether to have it or ask people to bring sandwiches and use local restaurants.
2. Space - ideally a large room to serve it and a catering kitchen e.g. a college canteen.
3. People - women in the Women's Movement often feel that they don't want to cook during a conference because cooking is a traditional female chore. This can be got over somewhat if enough women are involved and perhaps if men are asked to help too as they do for the creche. We suggest a collective of three is needed with perhaps 10 to do the various tasks.
3. Numbers - it is important to be able to gauge how many people will come (and usually fewer eat food than come). How easy this is depends on how early people register before the conference. It is better to be short than waste food.

4. Menu - a vegetarian meal pleases everyone. If cooking on premises we suggest a vegetable stew, but you will probably have to get hold of china plates and perhaps hire large cooking utensils (pots, urns, etc.). If you have to prepare food elsewhere you can have bread, cheeses, salad and fruit.

5. Buying food - the yellow pages have the names of wholesalers. These vary in whether they deal only with retailers but with some it is possible to register for a one-off occasion. You need a phone, a car, storage space as most places don't deliver.

Quantities: use a standard recipe and multiply.

Fresh fruit and vegetables: these should be bought at the local wholesale market where the retailers themselves shop. If you go at 10a.m. the food will be cheaper still as they will be anxious to get rid of it.

Keep receipts and make a note of what you spend.

Space, Time and People are the main requirements and you need plenty. It is regrettable that women at conferences don't pitch in and help at the time. If they did those who organise the conference could also participate in it more. Otherwise they end up tired and disillusioned and feeling like a waitress as well providing a mediocre meal. With many people and the chance to prepare the food in advance and on the premises most of the problems we encountered would have been solved but you will always need plenty of discussion in the planning group about the whys, wherefores, and implications of what you are doing if it is to run smoothly and to produce a good meal.

ACCOMMODATION

We expected that while many sisters would be able to stay with friends we should also need plenty of other accommodation. However, people coming were very slow to register so that right up to the conference itself the two sisters responsible for this area had no idea how many women would need to be put up; and they could find only one church hall. With this, and offers of space from individuals and the Kingsgate and South London centres, we felt we could house some 250. In the event only about 6 requests were made. Still, it would be risky to assume that overnight accommodation does not have to be provided in London.

PREMISES

We have to bear in mind that although an autonomous movement we are operating in existing society. Organisations trying to hire halls and rooms, in London anyway, have in fact a very limited choice, the alternatives being unsuitable/unavailable/ too expensive.

Conway Hall, with all its disadvantages, was the only one open to us that combined many rooms with a fair-sized hall in a compact and central building. This at once brings up the whole question of the role of conferences in our movement. They are not merely a social forum, but reflect our real need for communication as a basis for changing the structure that oppresses all of us. We must face the fact that we have to overcome obstacles just to be able to be together. But we should be aware of this in a positive way, developing our consciousness of the difficulties we face in a society geared to the needs of formal male-dominated prosperous organisations. We are going to have to fight for spaces fitting our needs and that we can create for ourselves.

THE CRECHE

The creche was open both days from 9a.m. to 6p.m. and regrettably but unavoidably, did not cover the social. It was run by Men Against Sexism (who have published a report in their newsheet) and we are very grateful to them. Some 25-30 children were cared for, of ages ranging from 7 weeks to 8 years. The older ones were taken to Dartmouth Park Hill Children's Centre and the babies and toddlers remained at Conway Hall within reach of parents for meals and emergencies.

We now see that despite the experience within the Women's Liberation Movement of the known political importance of creches this must constantly be rediscussed: not only in the general issues that arise in planning regarding assumptions and attitudes about 'women's work' and 'shit vs. interesting' work, but also in the actual operation of the creche. The issue of whether play should just happen spontaneously or whether one should provide some active structure or programme is a major problem. Also, if as we did, you hand over the organisation and running of the creche to a group of men who are not involved in the other aspects of planning, you must determine how active you yourself will/should be in terms of support and advice. In this case, the work fell mostly on one sister in the planning group, and these things were not worked out collectively.

Useful Tips:

In sending out registration forms, make sure they include a question about ages, state clearly when the creche will close, whether it is in the same building as the conference, whether food will be provided for older children, and, if in winter, ask for the children to have warm clothing for walks.

The most successful facilities seem to be those familiar to children, like primary schools and play centres. The policy of separating older children was considered as a result of the success of the Bristolcreche and camping, and it did work well, but this requires adequate transport.

We registered each child on a form, listing parents, all the things they brought, etc. Each had a nametag.

Surprisingly, some parents do not bring supplies, thus one needs a stock of clean pants, disposable nappies, baby lotion, plastic pants, etc.

You need lots of fruit and drink between meals.

We found that it must be made clear to people bringing children that they must be prepared to use the facilities provided. Some children's parents let them roam around the conference. This defeats the object of the creche and is confusing for those children who are expected to stay in it.

THE CREECH

The creche was open both days from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and regularly and unhesitatingly did not cover the social. It was run by Mrs. Margaret Davis (who has published a report in their newspaper) and we are very grateful to her. Some 25-30 children were cared for of ages ranging from 7 weeks to 3 years. The other class were taken to Lanchester Park Hill Children's Centre and the babies and toddlers remained at Conway Hall within reach of parents for meals and emergencies.

We now see that despite the experience within the Women's Liberation Movement of the known political importance of creches this was not consistently so. Not only in the general issues that arise in planning regarding arrangements and attitudes about 'women's work' and 'child vs. interesting' work, but also in the actual operation of the creche. The issue of whether play should just happen spontaneously or whether one should provide some active structure or programme is a major problem. Also, if as we did, you hand over the organization and running of the creche to a group of men who are not involved in the other aspects of planning, you must determine how active you yourself will/should be in terms of support and advice. In this case, the work fell mostly on one sister in the planning group, and these things were not worked out collectively.

Further Notes:

In sending out registration forms, make sure they include a question about ages, state clearly when the creche will close, whether it is in the same building as the conference, whether food will be provided for older children, and if in winter, ask for the children to have warm clothing for walks.

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SOME NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT

Origins 1968-69, in period of extreme political and economic crisis of imperialism, which has reactivated on a national level many historic antagonisms which have remained dormant for decades - in Britain, notably Ireland and women. 1971-2 witnessed new forms of working class struggle - in particular factory occupations. Within the last period there have been many examples, albeit fragmented and unlined, of political actions reflecting a refusal to accept the legitimacy of established institutions and a refusal to acquiesce without struggle to State decrees.

Who are politics for?

We've devoted a lot of time and energy to building up a women's movement. We have to be able to make some assessment of how we can extend our activity in a mobilising and agitational direction, making a political analysis of our experience. For example, do we want women's demonstrations to be for ourselves, as they have tended to be in the past, or should we begin to work out new methods of political mobilisation. How do we as political militants conduct a political practice at work and in our localities?

Whatever happened to sexuality?

Amongst the first forms of actions taken by women's groups were directed against 'sexploitation' in advertising, beauty contests, etc. But for the last two years there has been no public women's action of this kind, and sexual politics seems to have turned back into the privatised arena it was before we started.

How have we organised ourselves?

A) The most distinctive form of organisation of the women's movement has been the small local group. We can really date the beginning of women's politics with the appearance of the first of such groups. The experience of small group structure has shaped our conferences, where we combine small group discussions with plenaries. The small local group marks an emphasis on women in the home and tends to have a non-industrial orientation. Its purposes have become more varied as the movement has grown. Originally groups concentrated on consciousness raising and community action, now small political collectives, planning committees, study groups, have incorporated aspects of the small group experience.

Much of the original analysis of women's oppression came out of group discussions. Three important conceptions emerged: sexism - the view that women's oppression was not simply the result of an ideology (male chauvinism) and was not simply reducible to the dominant mode of production (capitalism, imperialism), but that there was a relatively autonomous structure of male domination, female oppression reproduced by and within the dominant mode of production. The pivotal institution of women's oppression was located as the family. Male chauvinism - the everyday ideological manifestation of male domination. Struggling against male chauvinism wherever it was found - at home, in the street, at work, became an important part of feminist practice. Sisterhood, the political solidarity of women, which it was seen as necessary to create through common struggle, as a self-conscious political aim.

B) Movement organisation has tended to reproduce the politics of the front, where you get together with a minimum political basis in common in order to organise a project (e.g. a conference) to work on a campaign, produce an information centre. Most of the organisational structure we have set up have had servicing functions within which the heterogeneity of the movement has been expressed. What this means is that general movement activity is dominated by spontaneity - political direction is left up to individual initiative.

C) Tendencies. The growth of the movement has meant that new tendencies have emerged over the past few years. One example has been the emergence of "pressure" politics, most obvious around the Anti-Discrimination Bill, with its echoes of the parliamentary aspects of the suffragette struggle. The Power of Women Collective is united around an analysis of women's oppression and a campaign for wages for housework. Radical feminist groups tend to concentrate on the production of a women's culture and female ideology, and the political study groups try to liberate Marxism from the dead hand of the male orthodoxy. Tendencies are much more united than the minimal agreement of the front, and often constitute a moment of rejection of the dominant style of politics within the movement, although they themselves may have spontaneist ideologies.

D) These three modes - small group, front, tendencies, are somewhat pragmatic methods of political organisation, but we do seem to combine in the women's movement a pragmatic spontaneism with an obsessive concern with organisational detail - almost as if political problems can be resolved by administrative decisions.

Certainly the petty committee politics which was an aspect of the work of the W.N.C.C. is no longer such a problem in the movement, but I think that we should try to consider what it is in our politics that reproduces a structure which is then complained about. At this conference, there will be women who find the movements structure one of our most pressing problems. And yet even this conference has exactly that element of front politics about it, and the reliance on spontaneity in common with other conferences.

Women in Industry

The strike by women at Ford's Dagenham, where a handful of women were able to halt car production, was certainly felt by women in the movement at the time to be extremely important for our movement, and influenced the formulation of the demand for equal pay and job opportunity. But the task of linking the political women's movement to the industrial struggle remains. The most successful attempt at combination has been the Night Cleaners' Campaign which organised around a kind of work which is linked to domestic labour, and which brought out the difficulties faced by non-unionised labour, which has often to take on a double struggle - against employers and against the trade union establishment.

Concluding Note

Obviously, notes like this can hardly touch upon the varied political experience we have had. But it's important to keep in mind during our discussion the changed political situation we are now in. The capitalist class can only resolve its problems at the political and economic expense of the oppressed and exploited. Increased political repression, the development of popular fascism, the forcing down of the standard of living, are all indications of the possibility of a hard period of reaction. And the domination of reformism and economism within the left constitutes a serious obstacle to the development of revolutionary practice. Those experiences which do encapsulate new modes of political practice and which break with the old must be studied carefully by us. It would be a great historical mistake if we chose the road of reformism - taking the option of fighting to ameliorate everyday conditions with no political perspective. We should remember that it is the consciousness of oppression and the determination to abolish that oppression which provides the basis of revolutionary consciousness.

Rosalind Delmar.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION WORKSHOP

The Women's Liberation Workshop began to emerge in early 1969. Many of the women who were active from the beginning were involved in the Anti-Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in North London, and in South London got together through the Peckham 1 O'clock Club. It coincided with the existing Women's Liberation Movement in America and in England with such things as Juliet Mitchell's anti-university course, the Essex Festival of Revolution, and the Equal Pay Movement.

Until the Autumn of 1969, there was one, independent, London-wide umbrella organisation which had no affiliation to a political party and was open to all women. Two small groups started up separately, but at the same time, they were in contact with and attended the large London meetings as well as their own local ones.

During the first nine months we managed to make a short film on women (Women, are you satisfied with your life?), carry out a sticker campaign in the Underground, support the Equal Pay rally in Trafalgar Square, demonstrate against the Festival of London Stores with Street Theatre, and against the Miss World Contest 1969.

These were some of our public manifestations. We were also talking to each other and other women about Women's Liberation - reading, learning, and beginning to grow. More and more women wrote to us at our ever-changing address. Many wanted to join. More small groups started. An open monthly meeting was initiated where all group members and new women could meet and discuss joint problems, activities and general themes. In September 1969, the Tufnell Park, Peckham Rye, Notting Hill, Belsize Lane, and Islington groups were in existence. They started *Shrew*, the monthly magazine, and decided to rotate it between the groups. At a general meeting in February 1970, the Manifesto was written.

Also in February 1970, there was a Women's Liberation Conference at Ruskin College, Oxford. There were papers, large meetings, small discussion groups and a creche run by men. About 600 women came from all over Britain, some from the Women's Liberation Workshop who helped prepare the weekend, some from different groups: Socialist Women, Women's Liberation Front, and a growing number of groups outside London. However, the majority of the women did not yet belong to a group, but had come to find out more about the movement.

One concretething which came out of the weekend was the Women's National Co-ordinating Committee (WNCC). This was an organisational attempt to co-ordinate what was already a national movement of many different women's groups of which the Workshop is one.

After the Oxford Conference, more local groups as well as four interest groups started up in the Workshop (History group, Sexuality group, Education group, and Women in Art). A decision was taken to employ two people one day a week at Barnsbury Road, Islington, to cope with the growing interest and numbers of groups. In late June 1970 came the chance of our first real office behind Waterloo Station, which was more accessible than Barnsbury Road. We tried to make monthly meetings better by having special business meetings and collectives in order to leave the general meetings free for open discussion.

During this time, women in small groups were getting involved in many local projects, agitating about Birth Control, organising play-space, running the office and producing *Shrew*. We were also attempting to change ourselves and our relationships, to learn many new things, and unlearn others, and attending our small group meetings and other large ones.

At the end of August, the Waterloo office had to be vacated, and a member volunteered her flat as a temporary measure; this lasted until January 1971. Two members agreed to work one day a week. Together and with other members of the Workshop, they started the weekly newsletter. At the same time, the Office, *Shrew* and Finance Collectives were set up.

The Workshop continued to grow, more groups were formed. We demonstrated against the Miss World Contest 1970. We marched together with the Night Cleaners on the December 8 Demonstration against the Industrial Relations Bill. On January 8, one of the groups organised a public meeting on the Bill, with particular reference to its effect on women. We again supported the TUC march against the Bill on February 21.

We were involved in the planning of the March 6 Women's liberation rally and demonstration, and worked on the four campaigns: Equal Pay, Abortion and Contraception on Demand, Equal Education and Job Opportunities, 24 Hour Nurseries, which were formulated by the many Women's

Liberation groups in the W.N.C.C. who planned the demonstration.

Within six weeks of our march, the Workshop changed from 13 loosely organised groups to over 40. By January of that year, we had moved the office to its present position at 12/13 Little Newport St. W.C.2, where there is one full-time office worker, helped by the office working party and individuals from the Workshop (this was written in 1971).

October 1971 - there are now fifty groups in the Workshop, including six specialist groups. An attempt is being made to connect all the small groups together in areas, possibly with an area office or information centre, to ease the communication and organisational problems of such an expanding movement.

In order to deal creatively and positively with this new growth, we must all individually take responsibility for what the Workshop is, how we want it to grow, what we want it to be.

From: An Introduction to the Women's Liberation Movement, 1971

New Group Kit

Women's Liberation Workshop

These were some of the early discussions. We were also talking to each other and other women about women's liberation - reading, learning, and beginning to grow. More and more women wrote to us at our ever-changing address. Many wanted to join. More small groups started. An open monthly meeting was initiated where all group members and new women could meet and discuss joint problems, activities and general themes. In September 1970, the Workshop started a monthly newsletter, and decided to rotate it between the groups. At a general meeting in February 1970, the Newsletter was written.

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THE FOUR DEMANDS

In connection with the March 6 1971 Women's Liberation Demonstration, the Women's National Co-ordinating Committee put forward four demands: Free 24 Hour Nurseries; Equal Pay Now; Equal Education and Job Opportunity; Free Contraception and Abortion on Demand.

No comprehensive statement has been prepared on any of these demands. Further definition as well as discussion of how to achieve them is an important task for all Women's Liberation groups. These four demands, however, represent only a partial statement of what we mean by liberation. The Women's Newspaper said: "The Four Demands point out how painful it is to survive - we want to look at how we want to live", and "If demands are the only public expressions of who we are and what we want, then we are depending on four wishes being granted and ourselves being left untouched". When we discuss the demands, we should keep these points in mind. Here we list the demands and comment briefly on them:

Free 24 Hour Child Care

Two thirds of British women aged 15-60 work. Many of these women are forced to leave their children in poor conditions. Other women who want to work don't because they are afraid their children will not be well looked after. Full-time housewives (unpaid workers) and their children need free play groups.

But is it enough simply to make this demand? Shouldn't we also be making explicit and constructive statements about the kind of care we want and about the quality of relationships between adults and children? We do not think of 24 Hour centres as anonymous dumping grounds for our children nor for any children: nor do we mean that a child would be left for 24 hours; but that provision has to be made for emergencies and night workers. We do see them as small, local places where adults and children together in a community can begin to work out their needs.

Equal Pay Now

The Equal Pay Law which comes into effect in 1975 does not meet our demand. Employers have several years to re-classify jobs so that it could in effect be impossible to do equal work. Under the Industrial Relations Act, most actions by women for equal pay are illegal.

Equal pay for equal work is not a sufficient demand. Equal pay for equal work could mean lack of recognition of our needs as women, e.g. maternity leave.

In thinking about this demand, we should question the whole structure of how, why and for whom we work.

Equal Education and Job Opportunity

"Women's jobs" are usually supportive and secondary. We are tricked into being cleaners, waitresses, teachers, nurses, secretaries, shop assistants, etc. This will not change until girls are educated equally and with boys. Day release and higher education should be equally available to girls. We must also fight against employers discriminating against women in their hiring and promotion policies.

We should be trying to define what we think is meaningful in terms of education and work, and not merely demanding equality. We don't want either education or work that is as unsatisfying for women as it is for men. We must question too whether in fact it is possible to attain this demand without first changing the culturally defined relationship between men and women.

Free Contraception and Abortion on Demand

We should decide whether or not to have children and when we have them. This requires free and readily available birth control and free abortions for women who choose to have them. We want to see research on contraceptive methods for both women and men increased. This research should not be connected with big business.

We also have to begin to define what 'control over our own bodies' really means. We don't want more and more pills and easier abortions if at the same time we don't begin to be able to make meaningful choices and not just end up with the freedom to get into a real mess.

We must also be ready to defend the right of any woman to have a child when she wishes. There must be no forced or pressured sterilizations or abortions, and our system should humanely meet the needs of the people.

Information for new groups 1971

Women's Liberation Workshop.

Three 24 Hour Child Care

Two thirds of British women aged 15-60 work. Many of these women are forced to leave their children in poor conditions. Other women who want to work don't because they are afraid their children will not be well looked after. Full-time housewives (unpaid workers) and their children need free play groups.

But is it enough simply to make this demand? Shouldn't we also be making explicit and constructive statements about the kind of care we want and about the quality of relationships between adults and children? We do not think of 24 hour centres as anonymous dumping grounds for our children nor for any children; nor do we mean that a child would be left for 24 hours; but that provision has to be made for emergencies and night workers. We do see them as small, local places where adults and children together in a community can begin to work out their needs.

Equal Pay Now

The Equal Pay law which came into effect in 1970 does not meet our demand. Employers have several years to re-evaluate jobs so that it could in effect be impossible to do equal work. Under the Industrial Relations Act, most actions by women for equal pay are illegal.

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THE FOUR DEMANDS - WHERE DO WE GO NOW?

I wanted to draw together a lot of notes, papers, bits of diaries I've kept since my involvement in Women's Liberation, which related specifically to the four demands. I thought of this because it seemed a real way of indicating the uneven, confusing, contradictory history the demands have had in theory and practice in the Women's Movement. I also hoped to be able to indicate the separation between the demands as they stood on paper - as a brief introduction to what we were for and therefore against in our present society - and about what we were doing as a movement around the four demands. And what we were doing (are doing still) was often split into national campaigns or at least campaigns at a local or linked local base.

But when I looked at my notes and papers and bits and pieces, they were too fragmented and often too theoretical to be of use to this history section. What runs through all of them is the need for clarification and connection. Crying out for it. What I seem to have felt most need of in very different ways as I learned more and actually understood more, was some analysis of the four demands which would situate them and which would enable women working on them to evaluate the work they were doing and the effects it might have on, i) the State which we fight against and yet live in; ii) women - our constituency, ourselves and our reserves; iii) other groups fighting some of the same things.

There are I'm sure millions of other things women would want (have) to add to my brief list - but these were the main areas of interest and questioning in my notes. And I think they still hold true today even though we have much more practical and theoretical work to use. It is one thing to recognise and state the contradictions inherent and specific and developing in everything we do or tackle - it is necessary as in the abortion/contraception campaign to point out the contradiction of having to fight for abortion on demand and at the same time to fight for the right of a woman to have a child if she wants one, to fight against enforced sterilization and the right to be sterilised. But still one needs after recognising all the pitfalls a way forward, a way to struggle for our revolution. Of course much more theoretical work is and will continue to be necessary in all levels of the women's movement. But now I feel a great longing for extremely creative serious and specific writing on campaigns, demands, action, community work. I feel - without enough justification for proof - that we are at a watershed in the dialectical relationship with women outside the movement. (And within?) My particular involvement is with "community" action and from limited experience here I would say that there is a tremendous welling up of approval for and willingness to learn from and take part in militant action by growing numbers of women. Many of these approving sentiments come from women for class based activity - be it around rents, play areas, private developers, prices, wage claims, strikes over conditions, education, and sometimes health. These fights don't necessarily develop connections between them. They even less develop any real critique of sexism. This is where we in the Movement, I feel, have to develop a militant class strategy which contains or works out consciously an anti-sexist strategy in practice. It isn't enough, although god knows it feels good and is 'easiest' to follow and /or join with, or initiate a purely class based strategy for women...i.e. it doesn't attack sexism necessarily, to work primarily or only with women on class based (mainly) activities if sexism remains vague and undefined. I may be wrong but my guess is again from limited experience, that sexism must be attacked at the same time as class issues (of course I realise they are not neatly separate - often both are intertwined in the same issue) but in different ways and with very different tactics, and levels of militancy.

It seems a most difficult task. If in the working class an anti-sexist awareness is subsumed - for all sorts of reasons - economic, ideological, political, under an awakening class militancy, what should Marxist women's liberationists do? Our movement and struggles have shown that leadership of any "traditional" sort would tend to postpone or distort or deflect women's self organisation around sexism. But also we have learnt that spontaneity is not an answer - is indeed a flop and sell-out as an ideology. What the fuck am I trying to say. Crudely that the working class movement needs leadership and needs to break away from leadership. Perhaps someone (lots of women) will know what I'm trying to get at and help me out. I'll go on anyway and try to finish this off.

The four demands (birth control and abortion, education, child care, equal pay and opportunity) relate to the specificity of women's oppression. They are all connected i.e. one cannot be fully won without the others - indeed they are almost certainly/could not be "won" totally in the way we want them, in a bourgeois society.

As much of a critique of capitalist society and a location of women's oppression as they

have in themselves, I don't feel they, in themselves are enough of a direction for our energies at this point. And in relation to my opposition to wages for housework, I think it is necessary to have a women's liberation commitment in terms of struggles in the community - housing, women's centres, prices, local health facilities, play areas, etc. They are all areas which women in their local areas are connected to and are a possibly more positive way to organise than for wages for housework. They also happen to be areas which are the location of a new and often blurred and subtle form of bourgeois intensification of control and take over. The COMMUNITY is a big deal nowadays and because it transcends the traditional male lefts' definitions of what is important in the class struggle it is open to both our struggles - women/class struggles - and to those who either must be shown the error of their ways or be defined as enemies*. I'm speaking here of the intensified control and mystification by the often unwitting agents of the bourgeois state, the trendy and/or freaky and/or drop out young and middle class people who rush into all sorts of "community" activities with no understanding of class antagonisms or the results of their activities, or the oppression of women.

This paper may be stating the obvious ...then show me or help me develop some answers...new answers. I think lots and lots of us are thinking along similar lines and in practice have come up with similar problems...let's look together for some answers.

What about the connections and splits between the economic and ideological levels of struggle both class struggles and struggles around sexism.

* (Enemies if in practice they in fact support and extend bourgeois power and control)

Sue Cowley

9

ORIENTATION OF THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

THE TWO TRENDS:

BOURGEOIS FEMINIST AND PROLETARIAN REVOLUTIONARY

(Note: This paper is intended to make a preliminary appraisal of the viewpoints of the "radical" feminists, as well as the "socialist" feminists, current in the U.S.A. and Britain as put forward by two exponents, Shulamith Firestone and Juliet Mitchell, respectively. We might agree with some observations by Juliet Mitchell in her survey Woman's Estate from a Marxist point of view, but we are mainly concerned with her point of departure from the "classical socialism" and to examine the "new" feminist politics. A detailed analysis is in preparation.

Positively, with the limitations of this kind of paper, we will only give briefly the Marxist-Leninist theory of Women's Liberation. We do hope the discussion at this conference will arouse interest in the study of Marxist-Leninist classics and the application of their world-historic revolutionary theory. As Engels said: "Socialism, having become a science, demands the same treatment as every other science - it must be studied."

Any serious examination of the views of the critics of Marxist concepts, which we uphold, will unavoidably involve using relevant quotations from the actual texts and not just our own comments. This we owe to them as well as to ourselves. Similarly, quoting from the Marxist texts is also indispensable.)

Introduction

"The class antagonism that in the general social movement rages between the capitalist and the working class, and which, with the ripening of conditions, grows sharper and more pronounced, turns up likewise on the surface of the Woman's Movement; and it finds its corresponding expression in the aims and tactics of those engaged in it."

August Bebel, Woman and Socialism (1883)

Women constitute at least half of humanity. The liberation of this half has relevance not only for itself but obviously to the whole future of society. Before we examine the international significance of Women's Liberation Movement in the concrete correlation of world forces at the present time, it is important that we analyse the main trends in their orientation, i.e. their theoretical approach, and aims, toward the building of a mass movement for women's liberation.

As Marxist women we can only adopt the Marxist, dialectical method of historical materialism to the conditions of women in the world today, as to a study of any social movement or trends dealing with their problems of oppression.

In our view, basically there are two main trends in the women's movement: bourgeois (feminist, "radical" or otherwise) and proletarian - representing the two aspects of one of the major contradictions in society, which finds expression in class struggle between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, impelling history forward. For lack of time, we won't make any detailed examination of the bourgeois reformist views represented by groups like the American National Organisation of Women (NOW). In any case they don't make any revolutionary or radical pretences and confine themselves to winning some immediate reforms for equality within the present bourgeois social order.

Instead we shall concentrate our attention on a study of so-called "radical feminism" as the major bourgeois trend (contrary to their claims), as opposed to the proletarian or socialist trend. Such an analysis, or rather confrontation, is necessary for our own understanding as well as in the interest of the development of women's movement for a revolutionary change in society. Perhaps conscious of their own bourgeois nature, the "radical" feminists realize the inevitability of this confrontation. For example, Juliet Mitchell writes in her pamphlet Woman's Estate, p.91.

"Perhaps in the future, the biggest single theoretical battle will have to be between liberationists with a socialist analysis and feminists with a

"radical feminist" analysis".

In fact, the battle is on. It has been going on for more than 100 years, since the scientific theory of social change - Marxism - was born, as was pointed out by Bebel in the last century. From the old feminists and other bourgeois theorists in the last century and the beginning of the present one, to the latest variety in radical garb, all have challenged and battled against the revolutionary Marxist theory of development and social institutions. How do these new radicals see Marxism?

Critics of Marxist Theory

Juliet Mitchell (Woman's Estate, p.77) commenting on the cause for "the decline in socialist debate" on the woman question ("problem") in the West, suggests that this decline is inherent "in the original weakness in the traditional discussion of the subject in the socialist classics". "For while the great studies of the last century (by Marx and Engels, D.L.) all stressed the importance of the problem, they did not solve it theoretically." (Our emphasis throughout, D.L.) She adds (p.90):

"Marxism has not been sufficiently developed to incorporate new scientific discoveries (e.g. those of Freud, which Firestone rightly finds so important). Finding a theory that explains the oppression of women will most likely involve us in rejecting some of the statements made by Marx and Marxists - rejecting them because we are utilising the methods of Marxist dialectical materialism."

According to Juliet Mitchell there are currently two tendencies within the movement directed towards finding a specific theory of women's oppression:

"Radical Feminists who are developing a new theory of sexist society; and those socialists who recognise the inadequacy of past socialist theory of women's position, but who believe in the viability of its methodology for providing this analysis and for whom the class theory of society and the demand for revolution (based on this theory but giving unprecedented prominence to women's oppression) is paramount". (p.75)

In her view Shulamith Firestone's 'invigorating' book, The Dialectics of Sex, is the fullest development of 'radical feminist' theory to date.

Firestone states, "For Feminist revolution we shall need an analysis of the dynamics of the sex war as comprehensive as the Marx-Engels analysis of class antagonism was for the economic revolution... In creating such an analysis we can learn a lot from Marx and Engels: not their literal opinions about women - about the condition of women as an oppressed class (sic) they knew next to nothing, recognising it only where it overlaps with economics - but rather their analytical method." On page 13 of her book, she adds: "But the doctrine of historical materialism, much as it was a brilliant advance over previous historical analysis, was not the complete answer, as later events bore out. For though Marx and Engels ground their theory in reality, it was only a partial reality."

Firestone proposes: "But there is still an untried third alternative: we can attempt to develop a materialist view of history on sex itself. That socialism has never come near achieving this predicated goal is not only the result of unfulfilled or misfired economic preconditions, but also because the Marxian analysis itself was insufficient: it did not dig deep enough to the psychosexual roots of class (sic)." (Dialectics of Sex, p.20)

And Juliet Mitchell sums up her own views:

"For it is against the inadequacy of classical socialism that both radical feminists and socialist women in the movement have alike reacted. It is against the background of the far cruder practices of contemporary socialist groups that the Women's Liberation Movement has been founded" (Woman's Estate, p.84)

"I think then that we have to develop our feminist consciousness to the full, and at the same time transform it by beginning a scientific socialist analysis of our oppression. The two processes must go on simultaneously - feminist consciousness will not 'naturally' develop into socialism, nor should it: the two are coextensive and must be worked on together. If we simply develop feminist consciousness (as radical feminists suggest) we will get, not political consciousness but the equivalent of national chauvinism among Third World nations or economism among working class organisations; simply a self-directed gaze, that sees only the internal workings of one segment; only this segment's self-interest. Political consciousness responds to all forms of oppression.

On the other hand, if our socialist 'theories' ignore our feminist consciousness they cannot understand the specific nature of our oppression as women". (pp.93-4)

"The trouble is that 'socialists' try to prevent feminists from having their 'feminist consciousness' by ASKING THEM TO SUBSCRIBE TO A WORKING CLASS IDEOLOGY - WHICH CAN EXIST NO MORE THAN FEMINIST IDEOLOGY. All oppressed groups - workers, women, colonised - can have their oppressed consciousness, but the ideology they propagate must be either that that is dominant in the society that oppresses them (bourgeois ideology), or that that they have consciously espoused for the society that will overthrow this (socialist ideology). The oppressed consciousness of all groups contributes to the nature of this socialist ideology - if any oppressed awareness is missing from its formation that is its loss. Feminist consciousness has been inadequately represented in the formation of socialist ideology, as the oppression of women, has, so far, been inadequately combatted in socialist revolutions". (p.95)

Thus the 'socialist' feminist, Juliet Mitchell, concludes that while Marx and Engels and other Marxists "stressed the importance of the problem (the woman question), D.L.), they did not solve it theoretically."

And the 'radical' feminist, Shulamith Firestone, declares that "about the condition of women as an oppressed class (sic) they knew next to nothing."

Their common feminist outlook: repudiates the Marxist theory of class struggle for the solution of the problem of women's liberation, based upon historical materialism.

As Lenin said, "Without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement." So, in quest of THE theory of women's liberation, both the 'socialist' feminists and the 'radical' feminists consider 'viable' the Marxist methodology of historical materialism for their analysis.

For a clear understanding of the feminist position, radical or socialist, vis a vis Marxist theory on the woman question, it is necessary to examine their criticism as well as their own feminist postulations regarding women's liberation. We shall give the essentials of both, within the space and time available for this paper. From this we shall endeavour to prove that both variations of feminism in fact repudiate the very fundamental principles of Marxism - historical materialism.

Feminists' Criticism of Marxism

As pointed out earlier, in Juliet Mitchell's view Marx and Engels had no theory on the woman question.

In her pamphlet, Woman's Estate, she remarks: "What is striking in his (Marx's) later comments on the family is that the problem of women becomes submerged in the analysis of the family - women as such are not even mentioned! Marx then moves from generalised philosophical formulations about women in the early writings to specific historical comments on the family in the later texts. There is a serious disjunction between the two. The common framework of both was his analysis of the economy, and of the evolution of property."

Regarding Engels, she writes: "It was left to Engels to systematize these theses in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, after Marx's death... Basing much of his theory on Morgan's fascinating but inaccurate, anthropological investigations, Engels had many valuable insights". "Engels effectively reduces the problem of woman to her capacity to work. He therefore gave her physiological weakness as a primary cause of her oppression. He locates her exploitation at the point of transition from communal to private property. If inability to work is the cause of her inferior status, ability to work will bring her liberation". (p.79)

"Engels thus finds a solution schematically appropriate to his analysis of the origin of feminine oppression. The position of women then, in the work of Marx and Engels, remains disassociated from, or subsidiary to, a discussion of the family, which in its turn is subordinated as merely a precondition of private property. Their solutions retain this overly economist stress, or enter the realm of dislocated speculation". (p.80)

As for Lenin, she writes: "Lenin himself, although he made a number of specific suggestions, inherited a tradition of thought which simply pointed to the a priori equation of socialism with feminine liberation without showing concretely how it would transform woman's condition." (p.80)

And she concludes: "Thus, the classical socialist literature on the problem of woman's condition is predominantly economist in emphasis, stressing her simple subordination to the institutions of private property. Her biological status underpins both her weakness as a producer in work relations and her importance as a possession in reproductive relations."

Shulamith Firestone's basic criticism of the Marxist theory of women's oppression and liberation is: "It would be a mistake to attempt to explain the oppression of women according to this strictly economic interpretation. The class analysis is a beautiful piece of work, but limited: although correct in a linear sense, it does not go deep enough. There is a whole sexual substructure of the historical dialectic that Engels at times dimly perceives, but because he can see sexuality only through an economic filter, reducing everything to that, he is unable to evaluate it in its own right... In fact he acknowledged the sexual class (sic) system only where it overlapped and illuminated his economic construct". (Dialectic of Sex, p.14).

The Feminist Concept of Women's Oppression and Liberation

In essence, the feminist theory as put forward by its own exponents is as follows: (Juliet Mitchell explains, "I have used the term 'feminist' and 'liberationist' somewhat interchangeably and refer to the whole movement as the Women's Liberation Movement. Briefly, liberationists see the oppression of women as one (though a major one) of the many oppressions experienced by different people in pre-socialist societies; radical feminists contend it is the major and primary one in all societies.")

"Women in the 1960s found the attitude of oppressor within the minds of the oppressed". (Woman's Estate, p.19).

And on p.20:

"Broadly speaking, the mid-sixties in the capitalist world were characterised by the struggles of three related but distinct groups: Blacks, students (and high-school children) and youth (the Hippies in all their variations, American Youth International Party - the Yippies - and draft resisters)." Women took part in these.

"Here as with all the other radical movements in which they initially participated, women have found their inspiration and their desolation. The fight for Black rights at first seemed to transcend sexual discrimination; the students were men and women; the Hippy communes accorded women the newly glorious role of emotionality and creativity ...but discrimination runs deep, oppression is larger than the sum total of all these radical offerings. The economic changes that thrust into revolutionary prominence the new 'educated' youthful middle class, that provoked radical attacks on the ideological institutions, caused the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement. Once it had arisen, like its predecessor Black Power, it saw that its tasks were greater than its origins: that women's oppression manifests itself in economic and cultural deprivation, that oppressed women are found in all exploited minorities, in all social classes, in all radical movements. That on the issue of the position of women, friends are foes". (p.39)

"It is far too crude to claim in an unqualified way that the Women's Liberation Movement is middle-class, but this is always done. Its largest membership comes from the 'educated' middle class and it arose in a country, the U.S.A...." (p.36P.

"...students came, in the overwhelming majority, from (white) middle-class homes, and these were, largely, where they were returning. Any actual poverty they suffered was temporary. Their protest then did not come out of economic exploitation or oppression. It came out of a new definition of the latter. What is interesting is that both the students and the middle-class women of Women's Liberation have open to them many possibilities of all the available education and wealth. It is these they have rejected as 'poor'. (p.25)

"What is the universal or general area which defines her oppression? The family and the psychology of femininity are clearly crucial here. However inegalitarian her situation at work (and it is invariably so) it is within the development of her feminine psyche and her ideological and socio-economic role as mother and housekeeper that woman finds the oppression that is hers alone. As this defines her, so any movement for her liberation must analyse and change this position."

"For radical feminists, as the oppression of women is the primary oppression in all societies, whatever their mode of production, a revolution here is the priority - from this all the other changes would follow". (p.52)

"Feminism...is by definition available to all women, whatever their class or previous political position: it is about being women". (P.96).

"Past socialist theory has failed to differentiate woman's condition into its separate structures, which together form a complex - not a simple - unity. To do this will mean rejecting the idea that woman's condition can be deduced derivatively from the economy (Engels), or equated symbolically with society (early Marx). Rather, it must be seen as a specific structure, which is a unity of different elements... "In a complex totality each independent sector has its own autonomous reality though each is ultimately, but only ultimately, determined by the economic factor". (p.100)

"The biological function of maternity is a universal, atemporal fact, and as such has seemed to escape the categories of Marxist historical analysis. However, from it is made to follow the so-called stability and omnipresence of the family, if in very different forms. Once this is accepted, women's social subordination - however emphasised as an honourable but different role - can be seen to follow inevitably as an insurmountable bio-historical fact. The causal chain then goes: maternity, family, absence from production and public life, sexual inequality". (pp. 106-7)

"...the liberation of women can only be achieved if all four structures in which they are integrated are transformed - Production, Reproduction, Sexuality and Socialisation". (p.120)

"A revolutionary movement must base its analysis on the uneven development of each structure, and attack the weakest link in the combination. This may then become the point of departure for a general transformation". (p.122)

What is 'the weakest link' according to the feminist conception? Is it the family?

"In the home the social function and the psychic identity of women as a group is found. Class differences at work (which anyway never produce class-consciousness) are here obliterated for status differences: 'wealthy', 'middling', 'poor'. This is not to underestimate these. But the position of women as women takes precedence: oppressed whatever their particular circumstances. Hence the importance of feminist consciousness in any revolution... Hence Woman's Liberation". (p.182).

- And, hence Feminism!

"Sex class is so deep as to be invisible."

"...feminists are talking about changing a fundamental biological condition... That so profound a change cannot be easily fitted into traditional categories of thought, e.g. 'political', is not because these categories do not apply but because they are not big enough: radical feminism bursts through them". (Dialectic of Sex, p.11).

"The immediate assumption of the layman that the unequal division of the sexes is 'natural' may be well-founded. We need not immediately look beyond this. Unlike economic class, sex class (sic) sprang directly from a biological reality..." (ibid. p.16).

"The biological family is an inherently unequal power distribution. The need for power leading to the development of classes arises from the psychosexual formation of each individual according to this basic imbalance."

"And just as the end goal of socialist revolution was not only the elimination of the economic class privilege but of the economic class distinction itself, so the end goal of feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first feminist movement, not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter (culturally). (A reversion to an unobstructed pansexuality - Freud's 'polymorphous perversity' - would probably supersede hetero/homo/bi-sexuality). The reproduction of the species by one sex for the benefit of both would be replaced by (at least the option of) artificial reproduction: children would be born to both sexes equally, independently of either... The tyranny of the biological family would be broken". (ibid. p.19)

"The biological family unit has always oppressed women and children, but now, for the first time in history, technology has created real preconditions for overthrowing these oppressive 'natural' conditions, along with their cultural reinforcements."

Both Firestone and Mitchell 'evaluate highly' Freud's sexual theories in relation to women and the family. The 'radical' Firestone asserts that Freudianism and feminism are "made of the same material", though she considers his ideas poetic rather than scientific. The 'socialist' Mitchell asserts that 'to ignore Freud is like ignoring Marx' and considers his theories 'scientific'. But they both propose to 'extend' and 'develop' Marxism by crossing it with Freudianism. This artificial insemination produces defective offspring whether christened 'radical feminist' or 'socialist'.

And it is nothing new. T.A. Jackson once commented, "Nobody laughs in Britain to hear of 'Marxists' who are also Christians, Theosophists, Spiritualists, or even Thomists - men who continue to divide their allegiance between Karl Marx and the Blessed Saint Thomas Aquinas, even as others, with equal solemnity, seek to effect a synthesis between the philosophies of Marxism and of the Herr Doctor Sigmund Freud."

This eclectic-opportunist trick of disrupting the living unity of Marxism into a rubbish heap of incompatible fragments has in Britain long ago attained high academic status. Postgate approvingly quoted Max Eastman (that great admirer of Trotsky) at the conclusion of his book Karl Marx.

"...the nascent science of psychology can be taken hold of and used for revolutionary ends... To those who like to use the names of great men as symbols, we may say that the next great task of revolutionary philosophy is the reconciliation of Marx and Freud!"

An Analysis of Feminist Criticism of Marxism and their own Feminist Concepts

Since both the 'socialist' feminist, Juliet Mitchell and 'radical feminist' Shulamith Firestone swear allegiance to Dialectical and Historical Materialism, it is appropriate that we should have some definition of these concepts (within the limitations of this paper) and thus examine their pretensions. Engels said: "From a scientific standpoint all definitions are of little value, but no harm provided their inevitable deficiencies are not forgotten."

By MATERIALISM we mean any world-conception or mode of thinking which treats thoughts, ideas, concepts, as 'mind pictures' - as the reflection in human consciousness of a real, material world, existing outside us whose existence is independent of our consciousness or will.

By IDEALISM we mean any world-conception or way of thinking which treats thoughts, ideas, etc. as other than reflections of a material world - other than the consequence of, and reliable pictures of the world of material things.

By MATTER we mean that which we apprehend by means of our senses, the substance of material things; anything and everything which, extended in space, offers in greater or less degree resistance to pressure and manifests movements perceptible by the senses.

"Matter is a philosophic category which refers to the objective reality given to man in his sensations - a reality which is copied, photographed, and reflected by our sensations but which exists independently of them". (Lenin, Materialism).

"Matter is that which, acting upon our sense organs, produces sensation; matter is the objective reality, given to us in sensation". (Lenin, Materialism)

By METAPHYSICS we mean any way of thinking which supposes that behind the "physical" qualities we perceive in material things - including our own bodies and brains and their workings - there is another "something" which is not "physical" (meaning not "bodily", i.e. not "material"). The Greek word "Meta", meaning "beyond" gives the clue to the meaning of "meta'physics."

By DIALECTIC we mean that which partakes of the nature of a "discussion in dialogue", in which the truth is reached by the clash of opposite opinions. Applied to Nature a "Dialectical" conception is one that views all Nature as in process of development in consequence of its inherent interactions or antagonisms. Applied to thought and reasoning, Dialectical method treats all things and all concepts as products of a process, as each new thing brought into being by the inter-action of things different from itself; as things therefore which, being in existence, at once become themselves foci of further action and reaction from which newer things and formations result.

"To the metaphysician things and their mental reflexes, ideas, are isolated; are to be considered one after the other and apart from each other, are objects of investigation, fixed, rigid, given once and for all... Dialectics, on the other hand, comprehends things and their representations, ideas, in their essential connections, their concatenation, motion, origin, and ending". (Engels, Socialism)

DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM is therefore that sort of Materialism (a) which has been freed from Metaphysical and Idealist suppositions; (b) which treats the world of Nature (including men and women) as in constant process of developing transformation; and (c) which therefore manages its thinking in a correspondingly developing way - proceeding to view all things from the contrasted aspects of their many-sidedness, their unity-in-diversity, and their developmental sequences, external and internal.

Marxism draws its ideas from the actual struggle of the masses. The Marxian theory is worked out in close conjunction with the mass revolutionary movement. It is not based on ideas "invented or discovered by this or that would-be universal reformer" but "represents...merely...in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes". (Communist Manifesto)

Historical Materialism: "Economic Determinism?"

Juliet Mitchell rejects "the idea that woman's condition can be deduced derivatively from the economy (Engels), or equated symbolically with society (early Marx)." And Firestone says: "It would be a mistake to attempt to explain the oppression of women according to this strictly economic interpretation."

Let us rectify the distortions both indulge in while dealing with the Marxist theory of Historical Materialism and other Marxist concepts which they represent as "economic determinism".

Similar academic approaches have been practiced by various "interpreters" of Marxism over a long period of time. Again, Raymond Postgate, the historian, provides a typical example in his book Karl Marx. "The materialist conception of history is sometimes referred to as 'economic determinism'. This phrase is less exact, but it is not unjustified. Marx continually insists that the developments which he anticipates, as well as he describes, are ineluctable results of economic forces."

(Lest I should offend feminist sensibilities I would like to make it clear that, like other Marxists, I use the word MAN, as a generic term to denote the human species; as one may use the word APE in reference not only to the male of the species - D.L.)

According to Dialectical Materialism, Practice, i.e. what men do, is the basis of all development in objective history and in man's subjectivity likewise. Not only man's sensations, but their very sense organs, the primary sources of all consciousness, are

generated in and by means of practice - by what men do. "In the beginning was the Deed" (Goethe). To seek to interpret Marx so as to leave men's deeds out is as "rational" as it would be to isolate a bung hole in order to build a barrel round it.

The vulgarisers of Marxism, when referring to economic forces, i.e. productive forces, forget that the human agents and human relations in production are included in the sum total of "productive" or economic forces. For instance "Of all the instruments of production, the greatest productive force is the revolutionary class itself".
(Marx, Poverty of Philosophy)

It was due to such distortion that Engels had to point out as follows:

"According to the Materialist Conception of history the determining element is, ultimately, production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. If therefore someone twists this into the statement that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract, and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure - political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle etc. - forms of law - and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the combatants: political, legal and philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma - also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles, and in many cases preponderate in determining their form."

"There is an interaction of all these elements, in which, amid all the endless host of accidents (i.e. of things and events whose inner connection is so remote or so impossible to prove that we regard it as absent and negligible), the economic elements finally asserts itself as the necessary."

"Were it otherwise the application of the theory to any period of history one chose would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree."

"We make our own history; but in the first place under very definite presuppositions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are finally decisive."

"...History makes itself in such a way that the final result always arises from conflicts between many individual wills, of which each again has been made what it is by a host of particular conditions of life. Thus there are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite series of parallelograms of forces, which give rise to one resultant - the historical event."

"This again may itself be viewed as the product of power which, taken as a whole, works unconsciously and without volition. For what each individual wills is obstructed by everyone else, and what emerges is something no one willed. Thus past history proceeds in the manner of a natural process and is also essentially subject to the same laws of movement."

"But from the fact that individual wills...do not attain what they want, but are merged into a collective mean, a common resultant, it must not be concluded that their value equals zero. On the contrary, each contributes to the resultant and is to this degree involved in it". (Engels to Bloch, September 21st, 1890).

Chairman Mao wrote:

"True, the productive forces, practice and the economic base generally play the principal and decisive role; whoever denies this is not a materialist. But it must also be admitted that in certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production, theory and the superstructure in turn manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role. The creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory plays the principal and decisive role in those times of which Lenin said, 'Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement'". (On Contradiction, Selected Works, Vol.1, p.336).

"Disjunction" in Theory

Further; Mitchell complains that to say nothing of writing any theory on the women question, in his works, "women as such are not even mentioned". According to her Marx's main crime seems to be that he 'moves from generalised philosophical formulations about women in the early writings to specific historical comments on the family in the earlier texts.' And Engels, like his senior collaborator in science, committed the crime also of not examining the woman question as such but in relation to the family "as a precondition of private property".

Let us examine these Marxist 'crimes'. Before the discovery of Dialectical and Historical Materialism the Materialists' interpretation was vulgarised, mechanical and non-dialectical. Their limitation lay, as Engels put it, in their "inability to comprehend the universe as a process, as matter undergoing uninterrupted historical development". That is why these metaphysical or idealist materialists tried to comprehend phenomena not in their inter-connection, interdependence and historical development, but in isolation as such (separated) phenomena.

Mitchell, claiming to be an historical materialist wishes that Marx and Engels had overthrown the world-historic science of Dialectical and Historical Materialism they founded and reverted back to mechanical vulgar materialism in dealing with the woman question.

Does she ask that the oppression of women should be examined, as such, not how it actually arose in history as the society developed, in the primitive gentile society, in the family, and in relation to the fundamental condition of all social development - the development of productive forces, the development of the division of labour, property?

If the crime committed by Marx and Engels was that they dealt with the woman question in the context of the family, is it not true both Mitchell and Firestone are doing the same, even though in a bourgeois, metaphysical way? Let us quote their position:

"What is the universal or general area which defines her oppression? "The family and the psychology of femininity are clearly crucial here".

And we must comment here:

The family is a socio-economic structure or formation arisen and developing in history, and what is "psychology of femininity" if not the subjective reflection of her material condition of life in the family and general society?

Of course the fundamental basis of Firestone's thesis is the "Biological family". Regarding this "atemporal" structure, it seems Juliet Mitchell shares views with her fellow feminist across the Atlantic.

Before we discuss the Marxist view on woman and the family in relation to her liberation, perhaps it would be useful to make our comment on this "atemporal" biological phenomenon:

Juliet Mitchell writes: "reproduction is seen as an apparently constant atemporal (timeless) phenomenon - part of biology rather than history. In fact this (biology) is an illusion. What is true is that the 'mode of reproduction' does not vary with the 'mode of production'; it can remain effectively the same through a number of different modes of production. For it has been defined till now by its uncontrollable, natural character and to this extent has been an unmodified biological fact. As long as reproduction remained a natural phenomenon, of course, women were effectively doomed to social exploitation."

Both Mitchell and Firestone find the biological status and function of women in reproduction as the cause of women's oppression, as manifested in the "psychology of femininity". According to them, with the development of modern technology ("economics") - contraception and totally voluntary child-bearing will liberate the woman from the primeval root cause of her oppression - procreation.

According to their own thesis it is the development of technology - i.e. economic pro-

duction - which will liberate women from their basic, fundamental oppression. Perhaps they would care to ponder, what are the historical productive (including production relations) forces which are bringing about such technological advances?

It is true that up till now the reproduction of the human species takes place through the biology of the male and female by the sexual act and the woman bears the burden of pregnancy and child-birth. As the mode of intake of food is still through the mouth and nutrition is consumed through the human digestive system and it is atemporal, in a similar way the mode of reproduction is atemporal. These natural processes are common to the whole animal and vegetable world according to their own systems. As we shall see it is the very faculty of determining the technology of production in concrete historical relations that distinguishes man from other biological species.

Isn't it strange that Juliet Mitchell herself acknowledges that it is the economic changes in society (U.S.A.) which brought the Women's Liberation Movement (feminist consciousness) into being? She writes:

"The economic changes that thrust into revolutionary prominence the new 'educated' youthful middle class, that provoked radical attacks on the ideological institutions, caused the rise of the Women's Liberation Movement."

The process whereby Mankind as a biological species came into being is antecedent to all human history. It is part of natural history and as such has been explored by the biologists. But what biology as such cannot explain is the subsequent development of mankind's group combinations - their historical permutation! It was at one time a favourite argument with the supernaturalists that, as there has been no ascertainable modification of the human species in any essentials in the period of recorded history, there is therefore no "proof" of the "evolution theory". The argument has lapsed more in consequence of the overwhelming mass of evidence as to the truth of natural transformation in other departments of biology than in consequence of the discovery of a few fossil remains classifiable as on the border-line between Ape and Man.

That at some point or another the transition was made nobody nowadays doubts. (Very recently anthropological finds in Africa and China "Peking Man" provide fresh evidence). But as to how it was made nobody except Marx and Engels ever offered anything more than a conjecture. Here is how they tackle the problem:

"We may distinguish human beings from animals by consciousness, by religion, by anything you please. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their own means of subsistence - a step necessitated by their own bodily organisation". (Marx-Engels, German Ideology)

All the greatest discoveries are marvellous in their simplicity - once they are discovered. And to Marx and Engels this discovery was so self-evident that they claimed credit for it only so far as it included in the wider generalisation of the Materialist Conception of History. Yet so far is it from being self-evident that only a minority even of the nominal adherents of Marxism have ever grasped this self-production of man as its central, dynamic, pivotal point:

"Inasmuch as human beings produce their own means of subsistence they, indirectly, produce their own material life. The necessities of life are, above all, food, drink, shelter, clothing and a few others. Hence the first historical act is the production of the means for the satisfaction of these needs, and thereby the production of material life itself. This one historical fact is a fundamental determinant of all history (Marx-Engels, ibid.)

So it is not the biological fact of male-female sex relations which determine the oppression or liberation of women, but in fact we shall show that despite the present mode of reproduction of species, it is the productive forces which determine the relations and position of man, woman and child.

Are Women a Class?

Shulamith Firestone asserts "sex class is so deep as to be invisible" (a phantom of her imagination, D.L.). "Unlike economic class, sex class springs directly from a biological reality...about the condition of women as an oppressed class they (Marx and Engels) knew next to nothing.

Quite arbitrarily and contrary to any scientific basis, Firestone asserts that since the "feminists are talking about changing a fundamental biological condition... That so profound a change cannot be easily fitted into traditional categories of thought, e.g. 'political'" (and, we may add, the historically evolved, scientific concept of classes) "...because they are not big enough, radical feminism bursts through them. Such an unscientific reasoning does not need any comment.

But her fellow 'socialist' feminist can't be outdone. Juliet Mitchell asserts that the woman question is beyond classes or takes "precedence" over class. It is significant that she complains (about the suffragettes): "The most prominent of them never submerged their class interest in their own feminist struggle. Today, the conditions for doing precisely this are present." (Are they? D.L.)

This is how she concludes her book Woman's Estate:

"In the home the social function and the psychic identity of women as a group is found. Class differences at work (which anyway never produce class-consciousness) are here obliterated for status differences: 'wealthy', 'middling', 'poor'. This is not to underestimate these. But the position of women as women takes precedence: oppressed whatever their particular circumstances. Hence the importance of feminist consciousness in any revolution...Hence Woman's Liberation."

Yet these people have the pretensions of being Historical Materialists. Let us examine the actual Historical Materialist position with regard to classes.

In his Principles of Communism Engels wrote,

"The working classes have always, according to the different stages of development of society, lived in different circumstances and had different relations to the owning and ruling classes".

Marx and Engels wrote in The Communist Manifesto:

"Modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones."

They note that in each of these epochs there existed in all classes "subordinate gradations" a fact which plays a big part in the dialectic of class development. The following extract from Marx's "Eighteenth Brumaire" leaves no room for doubt as to the basic meaning of the term "class" and its relation to the prevailing mode of production on the one side, and the conventional social stratification on the other. Marx is speaking of the French peasant proprietors:

"Throughout the country, they live in almost identical conditions, but enter very little into relationship with each other. Their mode of production, instead of bringing them mutually into contact, isolates them. This isolation moreover is intensified by the inadequacy of the means of communication in France (1852) and by the peasants' own poverty. Their farms are so small that there is practically no room for division of labour, no chance for scientific agriculture. Among the peasantry therefore there is no possibility of manifoldness in development, no differentiation in talents, no wealth of social relationships. Each family is almost self-sufficing; producing as it does the greater part of its requirements from its own plot of land, and thus providing itself with the necessities of life through an intercourse with Nature rather than by means of social interchange. Here is one small plot of land, with one peasant farmer and his family; there is another plot of land another peasant with a wife and children.

A score or two of these atoms make up a village; a few score villages make up a Department. In this way, by the simple addition of identical entities, the mass of the French nation is made up - much as a number of potatoes enclosed in a sack constitute a sack of potatoes.

"In so far as millions of families live in production relations which distinguishes their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of other classes, and set them more or less in opposition to other classes, these peasant families form a class. But in so far as they are united by ties of simple propinquity and so far as their identity of interests has as yet failed to find expression in a national association, in a community, they do not form a class. Thus it is that they are unable to assert their class interests in their own name, whether through parliament or a congress. They cannot represent themselves: they must be represented."

From privileged bourgeois academics who display an abundant erudition of Marxist classics, one would expect a minimum of 'intellectual' honesty in presenting these Marxist classics.

Instead, Juliet Mitchell alleges, "Engels effectively reduces the problem of women to her capacity to work. He therefore gave her physiological weakness as a primary cause of her oppression... If inability to work is the cause of her inferior status, ability to work will bring her liberation". (Woman's Estate, p.79). This is a strange accusation to throw at Engels, the co-founder of scientific socialism. Can the capacity to work of any individual be considered in the abstract, without reference to concrete historical conditions of social production? She knows very well that Marx and Engels had a deep understanding of woman's capacity to work. They analysed the concrete conditions of social production at the stage of breakup of the gentile communal society, and the emergence of a class society, when woman's inevitable position in the domestic (family) economy created her slavery. Therefore they considered the historical necessity of women's participation in social production as the first pre-condition of her emancipation. Even Juliet Mitchell has quoted Engels; let the quotation speak for itself:

"...the emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so as long as women are excluded from socially productive work and restricted to housework, which is private. The emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large, social scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree."

"The first premise for emancipation of women is the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry...this...demands that the quality possessed by the individual family of being the economic unit of society be abolished". (Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State).

Do we have to demonstrate any further that it is not the inadequacy of Marxist theory, but the inadequacy, rather bankruptcy, of the feminist Mitchell and Firestone in their understanding of Dialectical and Historical Materialism.

Juliet Mitchell is in a quandary when she writes:

"It ('feminism') is, by definition available to all women, whatever their class or previous political position: it is about being women. In itself it can produce no revolutionary ideology, any more than the consciousness of workers on its own can produce this." And she quotes, we presume, with approval, from Lenin:

"Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is - either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a 'third' ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or an above-class ideology). Hence, to belittle the socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology". (V.I. Lenin, What is to be Done)

Then she complains, "The trouble is that 'socialists' try to prevent feminists from having their 'feminist consciousness' by asking them to subscribe to a working class 'ideology' - which can exist no more than feminist ideology."

Is it true that the great Socialist - Communist, rather, V.I. Lenin, was opposed to women being conscious of their own oppression and their specific demands? Let Lenin speak for himself:

"That is why it is right for us to put forward demands favourable to women... Our demands are practical conclusions which we have drawn from the burning needs, the shameful humiliation of women, in bourgeois society, defenseless and without rights. We demonstrate thereby that we recognise these needs, and are sensible of the humiliation of the woman, the privileges of the man. That we hate, yes, hate everything, and will abolish everything which tortures and oppresses the woman worker, the housewife, the peasant woman, the wife of the petty trader, and in many cases the women of the possessing classes. The rights and social regulations which we demand for women from bourgeois society show that we understand the position and interests of women and will have consideration for them under the proletarian dictatorship. Not, of course, as the reformists do, lulling them to inaction and keeping them in leading strings...but as revolutionaries who call upon the women to work as equals in transforming the old economy and ideology."

"Must I swear to you that the struggles for our demands for women must be bound up with the object of seizing power, of establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat? That is our Alpha and Omega at the present time. But the women of the working people will not feel irresistibly driven into sharing our struggles for the state power if we only and always put forward that one demand, though it were with the trumpets of Jericho. The women must be made conscious of the political connection between our demands and their own sufferings, needs and wishes. They must realise what the proletarian dictatorship means for them: complete equality with man in law and practice, in the family, in the state, in society; an end to the power of the bourgeoisie". (Lenin, Conversation with Clara Zetkin, 1920)

The trouble with Juliet Mitchell is that in her quest to create a new non-class ideology of feminism, she can't see the wood for the trees - the interconnection of the historical development of productive forces to the dictatorship of the proletariat as a precondition of classless society, where all kinds of exploitation, including women's, will come to an end.

As Marx and Engels put it in The German Ideology:

"The historical method which reigned in Germany, and especially the reason why, must be understood from its connection with the illusions of ideologists in general, e.g. the illusion of jurists, politicians (of the practical statesmen amongst them too) from the dogmatic dreamings of these fellows, this is explained perfectly easily from their practical position in life, their job, and the division of labour."

The desperate attempt by the feminists to create a non-proletarian, non-class theory and ideology for women's liberation only explains their bourgeois mode of life and the division of labour.

Conclusion

Within the limitation of the time available, it is not possible to give even an outline of the Marxist-Leninist theory of Women's Liberation. While dealing above with the feminist theory, by implication, the Marxist-Leninist viewpoint was also indicated.

It is very significant that but for a short reference to the position of women in China, the feminists have ignored the world historic struggle of the Chinese, Albanian, Vietnamese and Korean women, who have not only taken part in the struggle against imperialism, feudalism and other reactionaries, but have simultaneously achieved glorious feats on the road to their own liberation. In fact the biggest proletarian movement for women's liberation in the world is advancing forward in these very countries.

It is true that total liberation of women as of all oppressed classes and people will only be possible in a classless society, which goal will take a whole historic epoch.

Socialist society is still a class society under the dictatorship of the proletariat. With the betrayal of the revisionists of all the principles of Marxism-Leninism in the Soviet Union, the great land of Lenin, there has been a serious setback to the gains of the October Socialist revolution for the working class, including working women. In the bourgeois countries, in view of the similar betrayal by revisionist parties, the proletarian women's revolutionary movement is still in its infancy. In view of this we shall present a comprehensive Marxist-Leninist theory on women's liberation on another occasion.

"Long before the bourgeois historians had described the historical development of this class struggle and bourgeois economists the economic anatomy of the classes. What I did that was new was to prove: 1) that the existence of classes is only bound up with particular historical phases in the development of production; 2) that the class struggle necessarily leads to the dictatorship of the proletariat; 3) that this dictatorship itself only constitutes the transition to the abolition of all classes and to a classless society (Marx and Engels, Selected Correspondence).

"According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life. But this itself is of a twofold character. On the one hand, the production of the means of subsistence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools requisite therefore- on the other, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. The social institutions under which men of a definite historical epoch and of a definite country live are conditioned by both kinds of production: by the stage of development of labour, on the one hand, and of the family, on the other. The less the development of labour and the more limited its volume of production and, therefore, the wealth of society, the more preponderatingly does the social order APPEAR to be dominated by ties of sex.

"However, within the structure of society based on ties of sex, the productivity of labour develops more and more; with it, private property and exchange, differences in wealth, the possibility of utilising the labour power of others, and thereby the basis of class antagonisms, new social elements, which strive in the course of generations to adapt the old structure of society to the new conditions, until finally, the incompatibility of the two leads to a complete revolution.

"The old society based on sex groups bursts asunder in the collision of the newly-developed social classes, in its place a new society appears, constituted in a state, the lower units of which are no longer sex groups but territorial groups, a society in which the family system is entirely dominated by the property system, and in which the class antagonisms and class struggles, which make up the content of all hitherto written history, now freely develop". (Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State).

And from 'Principles of Communism: Question No.21. "What influence will the communistic order of society have upon the family? Answer: It will make the relations between the sexes a purely private affair which concerns only the persons involved and calls for no interference by society. It is able to do this because it abolishes private property and educates children communally, and destroying thereby the two foundation stones of hitherto existing marriage - the dependence of the wife upon her husband and of the children upon the parents conditioned by private property. This is an answer to the outcry raised by moralising philistines against the communistic community of wives. Community of wives is a relationship belonging entirely to bourgeois society and existing today in perfect form as prostitution."

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NOTES ON CLASS AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

INTRODUCTION: We are concerned in these notes with three areas -

1. The class nature of the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain

- the position of Women's Liberation within the class structure is often raised but seldom adequately examined.
- class is often thought to be irrelevant to the experience of being a woman or that sexism is the fundamental division.
- as socialists we cannot ignore the issue, but we must investigate carefully to what extent our movement is a middle class movement in terms of recruitment, type of organisation, choice of areas on which to campaign, etc.
- it is important to determine this in order to avoid the dangers of being simply reformists, egalitarians, etc.

2. Structure and organisation of the Women's Liberation Movement

- how far does our structure reflect our class position and background?
- given our present organisation, are we capable of transforming Women's Liberation into a mass movement? Or should we recognise our limitations and not think in terms of a mass movement?

3. Some proposals for Socialist Feminists

The relationship of class to structure has suggested that we need to find a new way of working together as Socialists in the Women's Liberation Movement.

We would like the Conference to take these ideas seriously for possible future action - to take us forward and give us a developing sense of our movement.

1. The class nature of the Women's Liberation Movement in Britain

a) The class composition of the movement, from our observation, is predominantly middle class - at the very least most of us have had an education beyond the age of 15. (Obviously although many women are middle class by background/ education/ occupation, they may have (i) rejected this for political reasons; (ii) may be in desperate financial dependence on men or the State.) We are not even sure that we are very representative of the middle class as a whole - is this true and if so in what ways? There are historical reasons for this phenomenon which have not been sufficiently examined. But in these notes we are concerned with the actuality of the present movement.

b) If we are right about our class composition, do we underestimate the implications of this? e.g.

differences in range of choices open to middle class and working class women in determining their lives. Choice obviously has an economic base and accompanying psychological/ideological components, but the balance of these differs for women in different class situations.

So the impact of Women's Liberation ideas will not be so at variance with a middle class women's experience as for a working class woman.

For example, we should see the difficulties of making the demand that women should enter the labour market when the choice of what they can do is so very different between the classes. (An added complication might be that it has been found that working class women do often go out to work both for economic reasons and to escape the isolation and drudgery of housework.)

c) We do want to attack the ideology of 'womenhood' but in doing so are we in danger of isolating ourselves from the majority of women and how do we resolve this contradiction? And anyway do we really know enough about the response of working class women (all women) to Women's Liberation ideas?

d) The same problem applies to the anti-male element in the movement's ideology; for many

middle class women there is a greater possibility of economic independence from men than can be realised by working class women, who are as a consequence often antagonistic to Women's Liberation (for example, we know of a group of lower middle and working class women who meet in East London called "Women's Action Group" who in interviews in the local paper deliberately dissociate themselves from Women's Liberation, although involved in the same campaign as us.)

e) Language that Marxists traditionally use is highly theoretical; this can make political action amongst women (and men!) on, say, rising prices problematic. Explaining the connection between consumption and production (considered essential in a prices campaign which is properly political/revolutionary) comes up against this language barrier. Many women socialists find internalising Marxist concepts difficult, let alone communicating them to other women. This is a problem of political language in general.

f) Literature produced by the Movement often illustrates this problem and the additional difficulty that in any society the written language is that of the dominant class. This is hardly any literature for women outside the movement.

g) As women we can talk easily to all other women and immediately communicate on areas of shared experience (this is one of our great strengths as compared with men) e.g. children, menstruation, relationships, etc. This has been part of Women's Liberation campaigns but have we discussed its possibilities enough?

h) Does our fear of "professionalism" and "elitism" prevent us from using more effectively in the Movement the skills we have acquired through a middle class education (objective use of skills rather than subjective guilt about them)?

2. Structure and organisation of Women's Liberation

a) The movement has developed different ways of involving women in its activities but consciousness-raising is still considered basic to the way we work. Is consciousness-raising itself, or the way we do it, essentially a middle class mode of action.

b) There is a contradiction between our need to organise effectively and our lack of structure coming from our dislike of hierarchies, authorities and bureaucracies.

c) We are good at raising responses, expectations for change, and making individual problems social ones, but we are in danger of leaving women 'in the air' if we cannot translate this into political consciousness leading to political action. Maybe the structure needs to change?

d) There have always been a variety of ways in which people's consciousness has been changed, action being one of the most important; shouldn't our methods of organising take account of this more seriously? Lack of any formal structure makes it difficult to "join" the Women's Liberation movement?

e) Does our particular structure and avoidance of a "class" problem reflect the influence of the American experience, different from our own and with a strong Populist tradition.

3. Some proposals for feminist socialists

a) It is necessary to define the class composition of the women's movement, not in order to feel guilty about its predominant middle class recruitment, but in order to effectively work, not disperse our energies.

b) It is important for revolutionaries to fight for all reforms but given our limited time, numbers and other commitments we ought to be able to determine priorities, say, for the next year. Over the wide range of women's activities - abortion, the family, women's centres, claimants, equal pay, Trade Union involvement, anti-sex discrimination bill, night cleaners, etc. Isn't there an area where Socialist Feminists could concentrate their action.

c) If we could define an area and really work on it for a period, we would then be in a better position to say more coherently what our future tactics and strategies, theories and campaigns, should be. At the moment we never seem to sit down and analyse, self-critically, our successes and failures. (For example, what conclusions did the women involved in union-

ising women, helping in the campaign, slogging away with limited support, recognising the long term defeatism, etc.?)

d) Defining an area of work would obviously be determined by our present strengths and weaknesses, but also by what we think the most important area of struggle is likely to be within the working class movement in the next year or so. Having decided that, women who were working in groups with a bias to study and theory could direct their work to be of use to the women who were in action groups who in turn could feed back what information or ideas were coming up from their contacts with women, etc.

e) If we could agree on a specific area of work, then the possibility of also working in alliance with women in straight left groups, trade unions, community action groups, would be part of our overall strategy. This would have the added benefit of enabling us to come to some conclusions about the notion and practice of autonomy - how far is it practical, realistic desirable, long-term or of limited duration?

f) Obviously this would involve a reorganisation of our existing methods of work to co-ordinate and bring us more frequently together.

Arsenal Women's Liberation Group

(This was prepared collectively by the group but not every member agrees with every aspect of it.)

being women, helping in the campaign, along with their limited support, representing the
long term solution, etc.)

4) Defining an area of work would obviously be determined by our present strengths and weak-
nesses, but also by what we think the most important area of struggle is likely to be within
the working class movement in the next year or so. Having decided that, women who work
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Women's Liberation Group

(This was prepared collectively by the group but not every member agrees with every aspect
of it.)

Background to the Paper

The group started in March 1972. All of us live in London and most of us already knew each other through the women's movement. At first there were fifteen women but after a few months the group stabilised at nine. One of us had already been in a (mixed) study group for a year, and we based our reading on the list she brought. At the beginning we decided on three basic points:

1. That we would commit ourselves to getting through the list before making any judgements about its value as a whole.
2. That we would stick to the "small group" structure - collective, no "chairwoman" or "leader".
3. That we would read one text for each meeting, with all of us taking notes for ourselves, and with one person, on a rotating basis, undertaking to prepare a summary/presentation of the text. Sometimes we took more than one meeting over texts we found particularly difficult.

At first we met fortnightly; when we had gone through the list we met weekly for a few months to revise the texts. We have included the list we used at the end of this pamphlet; and also reorganised the same list in chronological order, in case other groups might want to approach it differently. We had long discussions on what kind of paper might be most useful to other women either already in study groups or wanting to start one. We finally decided to present some of our individual responses to the study group experience, rather than write a collective theoretical paper at this stage. This is because we feel that the introduction to the process of study is as important as the theoretical work itself.

ONE

ONE

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We primarily came together out of necessity. We need to figure things out. We need, particularly because of our commitment and history in the women's movement to do this understanding collectively - and beyond that we need to do it collectively because we are women, i.e. both the negative and positive aspects of being a woman mean that collective study and action is necessary for us.

About two years ago there were quite a few women in the movement who were isolated and depressed on one or more levels of their involvement in Women's Liberation. Local groups, although tremendous in their effects and love did not give enough direction politically, in themselves. Everything one discovered in consciousness-raising, in actions, and study, pointed to change - but how? who by? in what form? what organisation? what tactics? strategy?

Spontaneity, separatism, radical feminism, etc. all gave ideas and energy but seemed to sputter out as ways of understanding in order to work without burning out or fading into private life. This we felt or at least we felt enough similar feelings to bring us together. And not surprisingly about a year and a half ago - after the first tentative joint efforts, women began to get together for political study and/or Marxist groups. It's obvious that I'm speaking here of women primarily from the London Workshop and other unaligned groups. Also of women who had no particularly heavy history on the left or in theory.

The women's movement as we experience it now did not just happen to develop in the 1960s. Similarly within the women's movement the development among groups of women discovering together that they had a common need to study and find some direction - both in personal terms and in organisational ways - did not just happen by chance. An original resentment and suspicion of Marx et al because of their "answers" (fuck them) and their primary presenters - the parties, sects and elite individuals - mainly male - turned us off (fuck off). Emotionally we struggled through and discovered vitally important things about ourselves and our society. And then we could approach Marx - out of necessity but/and at the same time on our own ground, on our own feet and with our own brains.

Now - having gone through one/two years of study groups - of growing awareness and understanding of Marxist concepts and the possibility of using them in the women's movement - now having changed because how could we be the same? - it's no use pretending our relation to the

Women's Movement is the same as it used to be. What remains is strong attachment, connection with the Women's Movement - that is the same as always. But I'm different - we're different. We've learned and accepted and worked on new and different things. We've done it collectively. So now we face/are in, the Women's Movement as a more or less identifiable group of women with certain experiences and assumptions in common - although not a monolith - many differences and confusions still exist.

This means different things - it means on one level we have a more integrated experience in the movement. I don't feel isolated any more. On the other hand I don't feel so much "part" of the Movement - I've set myself apart in a way. But we want to be part of the Women's Movement. Our theory - although it falters and changes, is ahead of our practice, both going out and into uncharted places - new women and new places and in relation to the Movement.

One's relationship to the movement: it's hard. Yelling about Marx and Feminism isn't going to make anyone really listen...listen because they need to listen...unless they need to... At this point I think lots of women are feeling themselves "Marxist Feminist" women and really want ideas and discussions around that. But what about our strategy and tactics in the Movement - the ideology is to learn from our own experiences but on the level of campaigns or action we can really only learn in a positive way from our collective historical experience or else we are forever starting out at square one - except that each square one is in a different place in the complex and shifting relations of society and in time.

Back to the study group: and anyway, where does the study start and end? One thing obvious about Women's Liberation Marxist study groups is that in my experience they are unlikely to become academic or to be seen as just another aspect of one's intellectual development - they can't be that if the group is in the movement - because everything pulls towards the movement. Why one has come to a study group determines what direction the group will go in - our group didn't all come from the Women's Movement but that was the dominating force and the only one (I think) which could best serve the group. The study group, by the nature of what we were reading and grappling with brought us full swing back to the movement. Our work was enormous and hasn't decreased yet. We tried seriously to understand the texts and to varying degrees this meant, more than we did, going over in detail the book we were doing, sometimes almost page by page. We had committed ourselves to going through the whole study list. We decided not to make momentous judgements, decisions or changes about the reading plan or Marxism until we were finished.

For some of us it was difficult to study; we hadn't studied for ourselves before and/or we hadn't developed reading skills. At first for myself I had to overcome the bourgeois training from school and general attitudes that Marx was dull, old, too serious and had nothing to do with modern times. Most of us in the group were engaged in the movement but we were all at different places in regards to studying. We also tried to relate the text to what we were learning in the Women's Movement. This was only difficult in that it was easy to forget the text and to get off into a very general talk about Women's Liberation.

Although we had made certain basic decisions about the group, we didn't have frequent discussions about how the group was working. Again I assumed (operative word) that we were there to get at these books and that if anyone was displeased with the way that was working they would say it as one would voice a complaint about the effectiveness of the study and discussion.. I assumed that because for myself the study group somehow was a different form from the consciousness-raising group and felt everyone else would feel that too. I think almost everyone did assume this but of course looking back now I realise that didn't mean the same old problems of too much talking, too little talking, etc. wouldn't get in the way of the group. Some women were pissed off that other women "dominated", particularly that it was hard to get a word in edgewise at times. We had a long discussion on this - those who felt wronged burst out and those who had wronged listened and tried to accept or reject certain criticisms. It was painful and as a catharsis helped perhaps, but it didn't continue and I feel has not ended. Because problems arose which were not resolved - it was not enough to turn over the relations - there had to be some development out of the situation - it wasn't all good or all bad on one "side" or the other. In fact there were no real sides. It raised issues but didn't solve them.

One thing I feel now is that I am much more aware of our possible differences in definition and application of Marxism. Like we've never been able to come to grips with the problems of the dictatorship of the proletariat. We understand and describe and talk about Russia but we have been unable to understand it in terms of politics today. Which I suppose means

as of yet we haven't got to the stage where we can make decisions about Marxism and Leninism (their connections), about the part and the dictatorship, etc.

Another area which I don't think we've come to terms with is to do with class and the class struggle. This may have a lot to do with the history of the class struggle as seen through the various male-dominated left groups. Lastly the whole bloody thing about ideology - we've really tried to get to grips with this and although we know a lot more now than when we started, there's lots to do. Not only in the business of politics of the Women's Movement, of understanding our oppression, but even the immediate problem of how ideology conditions our study in the group, our comprehension of the Marxist concepts we have concentrated on these past months.

Again to recapitulate: the study group and our practice. Each meeting one woman agreed to try and present either a summary of the text and/or raise questions and problems related to the text which we should discuss. As much as possible this was rotated and many times it worked - everyone was serious about their turn. What sometimes happened but not too much, was if someone was taking responsibility for a text, not enough care was taken by the rest of the group in their reading. I think what we ideally were striving towards was a collective responsibility for having the most productive, deep discussion of the text and the questions it raised.

Because our list was primarily a POLITICAL Marxist reading list and we were mostly in the Women's Movement, the discussion of Marxist concepts was in the second half of the meeting always related to Women's Liberation. My problem was an assumption that because we all accepted collective study that the group was a collective doing study, and one didn't worry much about how individuals felt but how demanding the overall discussion had been - an over-emphasis on the group and not enough on the individuals in it.

These notes jump around a lot. Questions, millions of them, haven't even been mentioned. Like what is the relationship of the growing number of women's study groups to the women's movement? How can as many women as want to, as begin to feel the inclination to, get into study groups? Can we, who have been doing the stuff for a while help? Should we let groups 'find it out themselves'? Or could women's groups (any groups) starting out cold on Marx do themselves and Marx a real disservice and end up turned off and with incomplete criticisms and understanding of Marx? Can we do anything about that?

TWO

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Before our political study group was formed, I had been in Women's Liberation for some time and had been involved in various activities within the movement. In particular, being involved in the Night Cleaner's Campaign made me realise that Women's Liberation meant many things which could be called 'external' and not just personal 'internal' changes, which up to them it had meant to me - for me it meant a great deal of change in my life-style, my self-concept, presentation and relationships. But being involved in the campaign brought me into contact with things which not only could I not control, but which I basically did not understand - how unions work, what they are for, what we can expect/demand of them, etc., why the cleaners had to do this work: the economic and political framework in which all of this took place.

And it is in precisely these two areas - economic and political - that I felt myself to be vaguely on the "left" but always in the most ill-defined way, it confronted me with my mystification which was in struggle and in conflict with my desire to have a better understanding of these things. Once having decided to find out, I did what would seem to be a very reasonable thing: I joined a Marxist political study group, which had a set programme of work, a teacher, and through this I would acquire the desired knowledge. But there I became unstuck. This just confronted me with a whole set of contradictions. And in particular the contradiction between teacher/student and the whole notion of knowledge and its acquisition. Above I said it was "reasonable" of me to go to a group where I would be "taught" political and economic concepts, yes, very reasonable. I had been to school and had been taught various subjects, after school I wanted to learn more about one particular subject and therefore, again very reasonably, went to university and was taught again and again I learnt. That is how I had (more importantly) been taught to regard knowledge: as something that is a narrative process with the teacher as the Subject Narrator and the student as the Listening Object. And also thinking that the content itself is not affected by this process.

But when I attended this political study group I realised that the content must assuredly be affected by this oppressive learning structure. There at the study group the teacher was a man (as had been my teachers in the sixth form and university - women teachers in only the lower grades) and although there were several women in the group it was the men who asked the majority of the questions and who had a far more critical attitude to the texts under scrutiny, although they had never read them before. This knowledge, this content and this structure were all oppressing me and it would be necessary to break through the structure especially for the knowledge itself to be unoppressive. Remember, considering myself to be 'vaguely' on the 'Left' I did know a lot of men (and some women) who used Marxist language and terms and who had all the correct books, all of which served to put me down and to mystify me even more.

And out of all this experience, the women's political study group grew - and it was a major breakthrough for me to be able to start reading certain texts without inhibition, and with people I trusted. We took a very long time discussing 'structure' and also which lists of texts to use, and how best to use them. It was the uninitiated struggling to initiate themselves without the necessary initiator in terms of all my previous educational experience. There was no-one there to 'fill' us with the knowledge, to 'deposit' it in us (the banking concept of education).

This meant that the first few weeks if not months we were all extremely tentative in our reading of the texts we had selected - a list one of us had which we agreed to use more or less arbitrarily, but once chosen, we all agreed to work through it in its entirety. We were all still very hung up on someone else giving us the definitions and meanings of things which were new to us instead of working them out for ourselves. The structure we decided upon for our meetings was that one person should volunteer to prepare the text in order to present it to the others, but that each person would also read and prepare it themselves. Generally one text was tackled each meeting (at first we met fortnightly) but in some cases we agreed to spend two sessions on one particular text e.g. the German Ideology. This, in a way, we were still in fact depending on the teacher-pupil structure since we heavily relied upon the person preparing the text to 'explain' it to us in their presentation. Sometimes we kept very closely to the text, sometimes we were very much on a precis level, and sometimes we went very far away from the text in the discussions. But there was a feeling that we 'had to get the "right" points from the text' which I felt impeded us and inhibited us from a very good critical attitude towards the texts we were reading.

One problem that has only recently arisen, and I think could only arise at this stage (after meeting for one and a half years) is how we are all developing politically within the group. It could only arise now because earlier we were all very unsure of ourselves, of the language and of the concepts. Now that we feel somewhat stronger and more confident in all these areas, certain problems can arise and the most important one is what we think is happening in the group now that we are no longer grappling word by word with one specific text. We have moved on in helping one another in understanding what we think is meant by the words on a page to discussing and arguing about the ideas behind them. And how we are handling this situation is the crucial political development stage that we as a group are in now. Is it just the generally more verbal members of the group who will participate fully in such discussions, thus expanding and clarifying their ideas, perhaps at the expense of the political development of the less verbal members who find it more of a struggle to verbalise and make the necessary intervention (or interruption)? How can we organise ourselves politically within the group so that we can all develop politically and not just split in two? That is our current political task - along with deciding where to move on to as a study group now that we have completed our initial reading list.

THREE

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My involvement with politics began with my involvement in the Women's Movement. I joined one of the first consciousness-raising groups which started in London in 1969, and stayed in the group for about two years. For the first year the experience was turbulent, exciting, discovering, communicating, beginning to understand and link together all sorts of feelings and ideas that had previously appeared to be private difficulties, and insoluble. It was the beginning of discovering myself to be a person separate from my family, with thoughts and feelings of my own. It is difficult to know how to emphasise enough the importance of that experience, and the beginning of collective involvement with other women.

However, after two years of meeting I began to feel dissatisfied. It seemed to be necessary once one had said 'it's not the individual, it's society', to understand what was meant by

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"society", and how to go about locating what needed to be changed, and working out how to change it together. My feeling of restlessness was shared by other women whose main political activity was concentrated at this stage on the small group. The groups were vital and supportive, and raised many questions, but there seemed no way to translate the groups into collective movement towards change - though one of the most important effects for all of us was the fact that each of us tried to face and change certain things in our lives and our relationships.

For me the movement towards a political (Marxist) study group was not an intellectual decision alone (not just wanting to "understand" better) but a political decision that was influenced by my knowing other women in the movement who were active in other areas - women's centres, squatting, unions - and who also were discussing the importance of making long-term connections between their activities and the movement as a whole. We have never at any point seen the study group as an alternative kind of activity, but as a necessary complement to other things we were doing. I find it interesting in retrospect that I felt able (if nervous) about joining a Marxist group - one of my strongest memories of the early days of the movement was a feeling of intimidation and hostility (inferiority?) towards women who had had histories on the left and who used terms which I couldn't understand - "capitalism", "revolution", "reformism", "theory". Having now peered over the fence I am sometimes uncomfortably aware that I now use those same terms (with more idea of their meaning) and may be inadvertently prompting the same responses in other women; the hostility that exists towards Marxism and towards women in the movement who are Marxists is a difficult thing to dispel.

In terms of my political experience in the movement, there is a direct link between the two kinds of group: consciousness-raising and study. Both groups have many of the same problems, and the study group raises a whole lot of others. I think there are two areas of difficulty in the study group:

1. The question of group discipline, when we're involved in a specific project such as collective study and discussion.
2. Group dynamics - the internal things that may crop up, both personal and inter-personal (not all of which in our case have been talked through or resolved.)

In the consciousness raising group there is no direct outside pressure. Each group decides for itself what it will talk about and how; the atmosphere is basically a supportive one, even, one hopes, when there are problems in the group. The process of linking both personal discussion of one's own experience and general analysis is in order to discover with other women the common roots of an oppression which we have been taught to think is our "personal" problem. And from the other angle it is an attempt to understand the way in which politically analysed questions relate to the way we see ourselves, our relationships and our lives. It is certainly true that many of these discussions have been influenced by the fact that both in the U.S. and here an important part of the impetus for the women's movement came from women who had been active (if subordinate) on the left.

The defensive closeness of the small group is less necessary at a certain point of political consciousness (though support is always necessary). The way the group works if it becomes a study group (or if a group of women start a study group) is different. It is no longer dependent on a process of internal dynamics. It is a process of intellectual and political self-discovery and group discovery. Some discipline is necessary, though not rigidity and insensitivity. But it takes a lot of effort to continue the process of reading and discussion; the process of learning from and with each other, because we want to, not because we are forced to, places demands on all of us. We have found it hard to keep discussions from rambling, and haven't always been sure on the best way to discuss a text. We have also had to deal with the problems of making intellectual demands on ourselves and each other.

I think it is important to try and be as careful as possible in reading the texts, even if it means taking longer over each one. Sometimes this is a mechanical procedure - going through, taking notes, trying to pull together the main ideas and arguments. I think this is particularly important if we are to learn how to use what we have been reading. I think we've all used our reading in different ways outside the group. For me it has meant the beginning of a confidence that I can, that we all can, use our minds, do theoretical work, in order to understand the theoretical connections and/or contradictions in the women's movement, and begin to be able to work towards an analysis of the basis of the oppression of women.

In most meetings we spent some time relating things in the texts to the women's movement. In some instances this was illuminating (e.g. The Critique of the Gotha Programme, Lenin's Left-Wing Communism, and Infantile Disorder), but I think it also had pitfalls. You can't just read Marx, etc., for what they say about the 'woman question', or apply historical analyses wholesale to the present situation. Hopefully what we try and do is extract the principles of an analysis which we can then apply. And in order to do that we have to be sure we understand the material as well as we can.

This is hard, especially in a group where (by choice) there is no "teacher" figure to whom we can defer, or whose approval we may want as much as our own enlightenment. But we have all brought different kinds of knowledge and experience to the group, one person had read most of the texts already, and although it has been and is a struggle, we have progressed enormously. We often had very tough sessions, where it was as much a question of working out whether we understood the same thing by particular concepts and terms, as working out whether we agreed with the concepts. I consider this to be an essential part of study; that we should learn to discuss, argue, agree, disagree, without it being seen as a personal slight or put-down. Intellectual understanding can only happen sometimes through tussling with new ideas, and mental work is hard and tiring. It has often been difficult and painful for people (and still is) to learn how to disagree constructively, how to have an argument in order to reach a new unity, or even how to accept the fact that you suddenly discover that you do disagree with other people for the moment.

This doesn't come easily in the women's movement; silence becomes passivity, talking becomes aggressive - we still polarise too easily and end up misunderstanding each other, and often just simply not listening carefully enough to each other. We have to work out how to challenge each other if we use words loosely, get incoherent, wander away from the point, and learning how to do so in an unoppressive way, not to undermine other women and learn how not to be undermined. It looks clearly set out when it's written down like that, but it doesn't feel nearly so clear in a heated argument where you can't always immediately discern what the problems are. We have only recently begun to assess how the group has been working, and all sorts of problems, resentments, differences began to emerge; there are times when the disagreements seem stronger than the agreements, but this is probably inevitable in a situation where we are all changing and developing our ideas very fast. The important thing is to try and find a way of dealing with things as and when they come up - though again that's easier said than done.

We all began knowing each other slightly; through the group we've got to know each other better, and yet the more you know the more there always seem to know. Our commitment to going through the list together has been strong and consistent, but the differences that have emerged are as important as the similarities; there are class differences, education differences, life-styles, differing problems with reading theoretical work, some people talking too much, some people talking too little. Though talking too much is often correlated with "domination", and is obviously oppressive if it continues, there are other oppressive characteristics. People who are silent have made others feel that they were passing silent judgement; sometimes some people have been unwilling to commit themselves to any idea, as though the study process were disinterested, and remote from our political involvement with the women's movement.

There are probably different ways of assessing the "success" of a study group. I think there has sometimes been a feeling that we ought to work towards political agreement above all things. But over the last year or so, all of us have become more capable of defining our own political positions and those of other women. This means that within a basic commitment to the women's movement and Marxism we do have differences of emphases, ideas. And this seems to me a great success - to be able to gain greater political strength from understanding both political similarities and differences. In practice this would mean that even if we split up, that the group had been a real success for us. I think most of us would now call ourselves Marxist feminists - though we might have slightly different definitions of what the term might mean - we after all are still working it out. So our shared initial commitment still exists; others have been developed, and other differences revealed. To me that is one of the most important results of a study group; to be able to define our own political position and direction and those of others, to be both supportive and critical, to try and work out our similarities and our differences, if the women's movement is to avoid the bogs of sectarianism.

FOUR

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When the preliminary meetings for the study group began I thought that I would not be able to join. My life was already crowded to the point of desperation and I was doubtful in my ability to sustain an interest in a purely theoretical group. I didn't think I could manage the reading and so on. However, I changed my mind, and I can't remember exactly why - perhaps it was the impetus of my local group, three-quarters of which joined the study group... Perhaps also, other activities began to ease off a little. All I know is that I'd reached the stage (along with many others in the movement) when it no longer seemed possible to "act" without some clearer understanding of what the political implications of our activities would be. Both in terms of the long term strategy of the Women's Movement and its relationship to the struggles of other oppressed and exploited groups, and also in terms of immediate political tactics, and our own personal commitment to some form of "action". I wanted to understand the relationship between Women's Liberation and the class struggle; I wanted to place the Women's Movement in its historical context - i.e. a specific phase of capitalism in the West. I thought we needed to develop our theory in order to make our practice more effective. From my limited reading and experience of left politics it seemed that Marxism would provide us with the scientific method and revolutionary practice to realise these ends.

On a less ambitious note - and I'm conscious that the rather pretentious sentiments expressed above contain only a very hazy notion of concepts such as "science", "revolutionary strategy", etc., I wanted to study Marxism with women who had been active in the movement, who were also friends and with whom I shared certain basic assumptions. I needed a group as I'm not the sort of person who can "study" on my own for very long; I rapidly lose interest in what I am reading if it doesn't have immediate political relevance. Isolated theoretical work seems too abstract to me.

I hoped then, and still do now, that a collective political analysis and practice would emerge not just from our group but from the experience of all political study groups that have formed within the last year or so. It does not seem entirely utopian to believe that we will learn to exchange ideas and information in such a way that will develop our self-confidence and extend our revolutionary practice. (I am of course assuming that those of us in study groups are also involved in a political practice as well - this is probably something that should be discussed - what is political practice?) It still seems urgent that we develop our theory. A year or so ago, I for one felt as if I was striding forward purposefully - but into the dark.

Some of my expectations have been realised in the past months. Obviously we have not emerged from our books with the definitive analysis of women's oppression or the correct revolutionary strategy. Nevertheless, for me it has been, I think the most rewarding group I've ever been in (I've been in the Oxford group, history group, local Pimlico group, Night-Cleaners, various vaguely formed economic-political/economic groups, and now Red Rag). I think this is because we do seem to have developed to some extent collectively. It has been interesting to watch ourselves struggling to grasp ideas and concepts which were either completely alien to us or, even worse, obscured by confusion. The best discussions have been truly illuminating - especially when we have been self-disciplined and considerate enough to let everyone contribute to discussion when they have wanted to.

Naturally - this has not always happened. There have been problems. I've had to miss a number of meetings because of family commitments. Secondly I've not always been conscientious re. homework - this is bad because if I'm not prepared then I feel as though I'm letting the group down.

A more general criticism of the group experience is that we have not yet discovered the best way to organise our collective reading and discussion of the texts. (How have other groups done this?) This is extremely important since we've found that dissatisfaction in this respect has led to much resentment and frustration within the group. It is difficult to discuss long and complex texts thoroughly in a few hours or less. But unless a democratic method is organised and constantly reassessed by the group, those with the loudest voices, or the most persistence, will dominate. This is a problem which will be familiar to most women's groups. There are two pitfalls which I think we almost fell into. Firstly, it's easy for the more cautious, less strident in a group to make scape-goats out of the "talkers". One of the most encouraging effects of the women's movement has been that previously timid and inarticulate women have been given the space and the self-confidence not only to express their thoughts, but to recognise that they had any. I personally feel that it is essential

to abolish feelings of diffidence and passivity in myself...I associate them with my "feminine" persona, which I want to reject. As I was told off for talking and dominating too much, I feel very sad that my self-confidence and excitement in new ideas has perhaps developed to some extent at the expense of others. But this has sometimes happened.

Most of us miss the collective experience of consciousness-raising, and have felt the need at times to combine political study with consciousness-raising. We've all felt a certain restraint re bringing up "personal" problems, myself because of my hangover feelings of self-indulgence and again wanting to change my self-image and the "female" - always concerned with relationships and feelings, not ideas, etc. This has not always been positive. However, moods do change; anger resentment, frustration has seldom lasted in my case for much longer than a week or so.

I think also that another pitfall which I particularly encourage the group to fall into, and which is not always the most constructive way to approach the texts, is the tendency to leap immediately from the thoughts of Marx, Engels, Lenin or Mao straight to their relevance to the Women's Movement today - now - this minute. Certainly I have a vulgar impatient preoccupation with the present, which can hamper our theory. Another point is that the group must take responsibility for group problems. We have now reached the stage where we have to decide whether to continue to study as a group, as we have finished our initial reading list. I hope we continue.

N.B.: Several theoretical problems have intermittently recurred:

1. We might believe we have grasped Marxist concepts and that our vision of the world and the possibility of changing it have enhanced - but - how do we popularise these ideas?
2. We accept the historical materialist interpretation of history. But what about revolutionary practice, in particular, the party, the vanguard - indeed Leninism altogether?
3. I still feel uncomfortable about the potential polarisation of radical feminism and Marxism. I suspect there would be disagreements within the group on this issue - although none of us are clear what radical feminism is, and we are all opposed to separatism (as opposed to autonomy).
4. Ideology and the relationship between the state and women in particular.

FIVE

FIVE

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1. The beginning is hard because of so many unanswered but very fundamental questions in the air - e.g. what does it mean to be a "Marxist"? How does the study group relate to the women's movement? How does one begin in a vacuum, i.e. without a body of knowledge of Marx's writings to relate new reading to?

2. The process of regular reading, meeting, discussion is extremely important. Important too is a degree of discipline to maintain the process intact, but without being too rigorous as to disregard entirely intellectual and personal dynamics per se within the group. The balance between these two is hard to maintain and it is necessary to take stock now and then to make sure neither one predominates.

3. The group soon evolves its own particular set of intellectual problems and orientations which have a cohering quality in providing a framework or points of reference for on-going discussions; in our case the following:

- a) Ideology; its meaning and function
- b) The notion of "vanguardism" and where we and the women's movement stand in relation to that whole set of issues (supposing we agree on what the issues really are).
- c) An understanding of "dialectical materialism".
- d) The problem over theory as a form of "praxis" and how real that "praxis" is in our lives.
- e) Relation between historical context and contemporary applicability.

4. Group coherence should be emphasised, especially in relation to the foregoing and in terms of how we can progress in our ability to be frank, be stupid, be sensitive, be constructive, be ignorant, etc., in relation to each other whom we know and have built up some kind of intellectual/personal relationship with. Changing members, open groups, must pose problems.

5. It is helpful to have a planned reading list (hopefully based on the trials and experiences of others) and stick to it - though not too religiously. A certain amount of flexibility is important as long as we are getting on with it.

6. I have found our final list a good balance and maybe helpful to other groups. It's tempting to get into secondary sources, especially over issues like ideology. I'm still not sure how far this should be resisted. I think perhaps it should form some kind of personal background, but the group itself should stick to primary sources.

Having indicated in note form some of the preoccupations and approaches which characterize our study group qua group, I want to go on to explore the confused and changing feelings and reactions which I personally have had during the time I've belonged to the group.

I joined some weeks after it had started and immediately felt disadvantaged. I was straightforwardly shy: I knew only one member of the group and felt that everyone else knew each other well and had worked together or met together in some capacity in the past. The shyness exacerbated my sense of intellectual inferiority (especially strong in this case since I had read very little Marx) and my longstanding problems in speaking in groups even when sure of my ground. Apart from political motivation this difficulty in speaking to numbers of people was an additional reason for joining a women's group - in the hope of gaining confidence and overcoming inhibitions of this kind.

In a curious way the combination of elements just described increased, rather than decreased, my inhibition for a time. Moreover, I felt a new kind of pressure: in mixed groups, because I am so often at odds with the ways in which, or the terms on which, things are being conducted - I feel able to be minimally content with taking a relatively passive role. In our women's group, on the other hand, I felt, and feel, a much greater commitment to the group process and sense of responsibility for my role in that. In early weeks, therefore, I felt an urgency to participate and a simultaneous sense that whatever I said had to be worth saying - particularly since I didn't know anyone and so I somehow had to prove that I had a right to be there. At the same time I realised that this was precisely to assimilate the present group to other mixed groups and to disregard not only factors which must have been common to all, but also the more general context of commitment and solidarity.

Looking back I find it significant that issues of this kind were not discussed at the time and that this is the first occasion on which I've been open about the extent of my feelings on these matters. I have always felt confused about the relationship between getting on with actually reading the texts and the importance of sorting out any problems which may in fact inhibit that process, even with the consequence of disappearing into personal hang-ups and group dynamics. I imagine there is a shared inhibition about inflicting personal problems of this kind on group situations.

As time went on the acuteness of some of these issues eased, but they are far from resolved and the result has been that I play a much less active part in the group than I would like. I do feel that the sources of problems of this kind are often deeper and more complex than such a group could be, or ought to be, expected to deal with. But with increasing familiarity and a growing body of knowledge, progress is bound to be made.

Another set of issues revolves around my own positive and negative responses to the kinds of discussions we fell into, and a third relates to the politics of the group and of the individuals within it, and the extent to which we explore our individual political differences or even make them explicit.

As regards the kinds of discussions that take place, my response is mixed. On the one hand I have never been in a situation where the issues under discussion were quite so open to genuine and individual exploration, and where the boundaries were not predetermined and the arguments pre-empted by a set of assumptions already held. The goal, I have felt, has always been not a body of knowledge so much as a level of understanding, and I think the process whereby we attempt to attain that understanding is a dialectical one as it operates in the group. The evenings we spend together seem more to do with thought and struggle than with dogma, persuasion, foregone conclusions, or so-called acceptable "Marxist" positions.

On the other hand, this particular process has involved some difficulties for me. Due perhaps to a mixture of a very straight academic background and to general insecurity, I sometimes find myself at sea in our discussions and much in need of a guide line of some kind.

I find as a group we are, and perhaps myself in particular, conceptually very naive and it is difficult to fit the many strands of what is being said within a framework of the kind that I myself can make sense of. Points are raised which seem to lie beyond the conceptual range of the group, and which, though really in need of being answered, repeatedly get passed over and left behind. I often find myself frustrated by this and assume, maybe rightly, that since whatever issue it happens to be doesn't happen or seem to be a problem for anyone else, it is mine alone. I therefore hesitate to pursue it lest it be at the expense of the group, but long for an explanation.

Related to this issue, and maybe partly accountable for it, is the fact that we are dealing with highly sophisticated problems and we are ourselves having to discover a means and a language for dealing with them in ways that seem relevant and important for our own lives.

The second set of issues I mentioned relates to the politics of the group and of individual members. This is an area to which I think the group must address itself in the future, for a number of differences which repeatedly arise in discussion, relate, I suspect, to quite stark political differences which on the whole either do not get fully explored or are insufficiently defined or recognised for what they are. One of the functions of the group could be to help work out some of these problems together, but there seems to be a certain amount of (unconscious) group resistance. On my own part, I think some of the explanation lies in quite serious political uncertainties and a lack of having personally thought things through, and a sense that I am either too cowardly or not yet ready to have some of these issues out in open forum. The fear of being judged (acquired over the years from other kinds of group and particularly from the academic milieu) dies hard, and some of the judgments that get made of those on the Left are often too bitter and unconstructive for one to feel very ready to expose oneself to them. Yet it is important to make use of the basically supportive context of the group to try to puzzle out these uncertainties and to be a little more invulnerable to possible charges.

What I am perhaps most clear about is that the group as constituted has been and can continue to be, an exciting and creative context for facing and developing many of the aspects I have raised. Whatever the problems, as women working together we have achieved what has undoubtedly been important for ourselves and hopefully may also be important for the movement and for socialism.

SIX

SIX

SIX

For me, as for others, the opportunity to join a study group came at a time when I most needed it. The Women's Movement had given validity to the politics of experience and this had been important to me after being a part of the Left where Marx and Engels were used as a stick to beat you with. However, after 2-3 years application of personal politics, the logical extension of everything I was saying and thinking was radical feminist separatism. There was a moment when I realised, with some shock, that I couldn't maintain that position with any political honesty. This realisation roughly coincided with the introduction to the movement of "Women, Unions and Work", by Selma James, and the political confusion that created. More than anything the theoretical weakness of the movement, myself included, was exposed and it became imperative to inform ourselves.

Over the years I had tried several times to read the Marxist texts on my own but found it impossible. Being part of a group of women, many of whom had had the same difficulty, helped a lot in the early stages. You could admit the horrible truth without fear of abuse or derision. But after the initial exhilaration for me problems developed. As time went on I found it increasingly difficult to do the reading. It took a long time to read something properly often sentence by sentence, taking close notes. If I didn't do it that way that thoroughly, it evaporated straight away. On the occasions when I read a piece as carefully as I wanted and needed to, it was a real breakthrough, just as when I was irritated and dismissive of a piece it was because I had skimmed through it.

Having got behind with the reading it became virtually impossible to take part in the discussion. I had a very dual relationship to the group. Outside I said constantly how valuable and interesting it was and how it affected me totally, which it did, but inside felt myself growing increasingly mute. For a long time I rationalised this by saying it was because I hadn't had a very extensive academic education (which wasn't even strictly true). I actually liked each person in the group but felt quite isolated and noticed the consistency with which I felt sick with tension at each meeting.

After some months, during which my confidence sank to a very low ebb, I began to get angry which for me is the inevitable consequence of feeling inadequate. I didn't understand why I should be feeling this sort of crippling inadequacy in a feminist Marxist group. I got angry at myself and my own bourgeois attitudes at allowing cultural and educational advantages to intimidate me. I decided to do the reading anyway; I could force myself to make a contribution to the discussion, however agonising that may be. I began to understand that in a real way my failure to do the reading was to do with lack of time due to other pressing commitments and not, as I had feared, lack of ability. Which means recognising what a sizeable commitment in time membership of a study group is.

At this point we became aware that several people in the group were feeling unable to function for varying reasons. That knowledge instantly broke down my isolation and I felt as I had felt when I discovered Women's Liberation, that my perceptions were real, there was something wrong and I wasn't mad.

It's very important for us to examine how that situation had arisen. The initial response of those who hadn't been able to function was accusatory towards those who could. But that raised the questions to what extent had the more active people unwittingly prevented participation and to what extent were the passive people guilty of allowing the situation to go on. I think we must acknowledge not just the right but the responsibility of each person to ensure that they can function within the group. The sense of urgency surrounding the need for us to do the theoretical work had meant a reluctance to allow the intervention of anything which would have slowed us down. I actually think we went too quickly. I don't think texts were satisfactorily discussed and understood except by one or two and often a different minority understood each text - usually whoever had done the summary.

Most of us had gone through consciousness-raising and recognised the value of this, but the feeling was, and I think rightly, that the study group should be limited to discussion of the text. But the result was that after 1½ years we actually knew very little about each other's lives outside the group and this didn't help much in our openness to and understanding of each other's politics. The task at hand seemed so imperative that we were terrified of letting the negative aspects of our femaleness, our fear and uncertainty, come to the fore - ironically that was precisely what happened to some of us.

Fortunately it is possible now to discuss these problems very openly in the group and we are already examining ways to avoid our previous mistakes. Honesty about what one is feeling seems to be the first priority and the group's responsibility to take seriously any complaint or observation. We are trying to work out ways of fairly dividing the time so no-one is excluded, while conducting a discussion around a text which is a meaningful exploration which doesn't get diverted and confused.

To me the functioning of the group is as crucial a part of the politics as the theoretical study. I already feel very positive about the future and our ability to work through and learn from problems we have encountered.

Some members of the North London Political
Study Group, N.W.3

READING LIST

A lot of the texts can be found in Marx and Engels Selected Works, Lawrence and Wishart, £1.50; these are marked * in the list. Other editions are marked after the relevant text. Peking editions can be bought from Banner Books and Crafts, 90 Camden High Street, London N.W.1 (01-387-5488) and are very cheap.

Historical MaterialismCommunist Manifesto*

The German Ideology, Part 1,

Marx and Engels, Lawrence & Wishart, £1

Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*, Engels

Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx

Foundations of Leninism, Stalin, (Peking).

Economics

Wages, Price and profit*, Marx

Wage labour and capital*, Marx

The State

The Civil War in France*, Marx

The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis

Bonaparte*, Marx

The State and Revolution, Lenin, Peking

Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels

The Right of Nations to Self-Determination,

Lenin, Vol.1, Sel. Works, Progress Pub. Moscow, £1.25

Marxist and Political Practice

The Class Struggles in France, Marx, Progress, Moscow, pamphlet

Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx

Left-Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder, Lenin, Peking

What is to be Done?, Lenin, Panther Books

Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Lenin, Peking

On Contradiction, Mao, Selected Readings, Peking

On the Correct Handling of Contradiction Among the People, Mao, as above.

The German Ideology, Part 1: 1845-1846

Wage Labour and Capital : 1847

Communist Manifesto : 1848

The Class Struggles in France: 1848-1850

Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy : 1859

Wages, price and profit : 1865

The Civil War in France : 1871

Critique of the Gotha Prog : 1875

Socialism, Utopian and

Scientific : 1880

Origin of the Family... : 1884

What is to be done? : 1902

Two Tactics... : 1905

The Right of Nations... : 1914

Imperialism, the Highest

Stage of Capitalism : 1916

State and Revolution : 1917

Left-Wing Communism... : 1920

Foundations of Leninism : 1924

On Contradiction : 1937

On Practice : 1937

On the Correct Handling... : 1957

Where do correct ideas

come from? : 1963

The Eighteenth Brumaire : 1851-1852

General

Lenin, Lukacs

Karl Marx, K. Korsch

Karl Marx, Mehring

We followed, more or less, the list on the left; in addition we read the following, all of which, except the Althusser, have been added to the chronological list on the right:

On Practice and Where do Correct Ideas Come From?, by Mao

Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution, by Lenin (Peking)

The chapter on 'Ideology and the State' from Lenin and Philosophy and other essays, by Althusser, New Left Books.

HISTORYWorkshop 1. Report: Origins of the Women's Movement : a critical perspective

Papers/Notes: Class and the Women's Movement

Some Notes on the History of the Movement

A Brief History of the Women's Liberation Movement

The discussion was intended to be based around "Notes on Class and the Women's Liberation Movement" prepared by Arsenal Women's Liberation Group and so we started with a summary of the main questions it raised. We were assuming two things when we began: firstly, that we could take as given the predominantly middle class composition of the Women's Liberation Movement as we currently observe it (at the very least most of us have had an education beyond age 15); secondly, that as socialist feminists our priority would be to spread the movement amongst working class women. Taking these points as given we went on to ask why the Women's Liberation Movement had so far failed to spread significantly amongst working class women. This raised questions about the ideas, language, literature and structure of Women's Liberation and about both the strengths and weaknesses of all these aspects. The subsequent discussion was rather disappointing for a number of reasons:

1. We had a larger number of women than any other workshop probably partly because we were in the main hall. A lot of women may have stayed for our discussion because they didn't have a positive preference for any other workshop and also late arrivals were drifting in throughout the discussion. The large size of the group forced us to split into two which meant that we lost the advantage of having the two of us chairing together.
2. We were the only two in the whole group who had read and discussed the "Notes" before the workshop. Moreover there were not enough copies to go round the group. In retrospect, it might have been better to read it aloud or at least go through it in greater detail at the beginning to give people a better chance to understand what the questions were.
3. It was unrealistic to suppose that the assumptions we wanted to start from were acceptable to most of the women there. Our description of the WLM as predominantly middle class in composition was immediately interpreted in emotive terms whilst we had intended it as a starting point for analysing the WLM. It unleashed a long discussion about the meaning of class and who was or was not middle class which ended up completely inconclusive. Since the first point could not be agreed upon we were unable to establish that our priority should be to spread the WLM amongst working class women and to discuss strategy in relation to that.
4. A major argument that came out of the discussion was that instead of getting caught up in a debate about the class composition of the Women's Liberation Movement we discuss how to work harder in our own unions to spread Women's Liberation ideas. This certainly provided a more constructive basis for the discussion to continue. In retrospect, however, it seems that our inability to confront constructively the question of the class composition of the WLM reflects both the wide range of political viewpoints represented at the Conference and their lack of articulation.

Jean Gardiner

Caroline Bond

A SENSE OF LIBERATION

This paper attempts to feel its way towards a discussion of the present politics of the women's movement, by trying to draw together a few of the thousands of threads we have woven over the past few years and raising a few questions.

If the Media had the Message, the Organisation was Ours

The early days of the contemporary movement began the enormous task of off-loading the suffocating myths with which we had all grown up, and through which we had distorted visions of the world, and began to piece together a system of sexism which oppressed women to a purpose (now white was finally dropped and we saw marriage as a boxing and anaesthetising process for pregnancy). The myths began with a division of babies into pink and blue, phased our minds through a whole spectrum of discrimination against women in education, job opportunities, pay, legal rights, to a climax of life fulfilment, the division of our own offspring into pink and blue.

The essential task was to re-appropriate our own energy, intellectual, social and emotional, and it meant working together with patience as we unfolded our contorted limbs, began to stretch our oppressed kinds, and learnt again to interact with each other. In the consciousness group we found that we could share these experiences in the most informal unoppressive way giving support to each other. The task continues; as an international mass movement, women's liberation helps these women in and around its structure, raising consciousness, locating the causes of oppression of women in the past, present and also possibly the future. It encourages self-activity and self-determination, and unties the binds of alienation and competition between women; rejecting the "responsibilities" laid on them through men, denying the ideology perpetrated through the media, the schools and the Social Services: its basic demand is the right of women to control their own bodies and their own lives.

If Women's Liberation constructs a base where women can meet, it is also the basis for an alternative. After the Oxford Conference in 1970 a national structure was set up - Women's National Co-ordinating Committee - to contain the movement; and demands were raised to cover the spectrum of our oppression and on which campaigns could be built: the famous four demands, equal pay, free abortion and contraception on demand, 24-hour nurseries, and equal opportunity in education and employment. Women worked hard on all these issues at both a national and a local level. At the local level there are now many women who work entirely with or for women on some or all of these issues.

Ring-a-Ring of Roses

Facing the nation has been more of a problem; dealt with separately each demand produced instant horror and little support... "Equal pay? - but you don't do the same jobs"; "Equal opportunity? - but women have children to look after"; "Nurseries? - but it is a mother who has a child and therefore knows how to look after it"; "Free abortion and contraception? but God objects and the morality of the nation would be in ruins". Increasing self-activity and a more determined and co-ordinated attack has produced results, but what results?

That ever present promise for tomorrow "equal pay in 1975" has progressed so far at the moment that the pay ratio for many women today is worse than ever before, and we have of course also had to defend our family allowance. The new green paper on "Equal Opportunities for Men and Women in Education and Employment" is full of sexist sub-clauses proving any such ruling redundant and they threaten to repeal the Factory Acts, (a historic moment for Mr. Carr maybe but in no way a herstoric one for women). Any money now to be spent on nursery education seems to be at the crippling expense of other areas of education and under the watchful eye of behavioural psychology. Finally, we have raised so much interest in contraception and abortion that we have encouraged "Population control" to a mission all of its own...sterilisation on command. Somebody seems to be playing for timeso if we think we are dancing in rings around the government they are probably just waiting for us to sneeze.

Women's Rights Versus Women's Liberation

Women's Rights are but part of of the women's liberation movement. There are many groups of women who are prepared to attack the institutions of capitalism within the democratic context of human rights. They follow up cases of individual victimisation of women and champion the cause of the female pioneer in any field. Theirs is a feminist battle against discrimination and the war-cry is : female representation anywhere and everywhere. The women's movement today itself encompasses a vast field of activities from the energetic offensive and self-activity of the women's collective through to the more defensive but yet often more explicit demands of the women's rights campaigners.

The relationship between the two is not directly antagonistic, but they continually bring to the surface contradictions inherent to the movement : development versus recruitment, organised activity versus organic activity, right down to the question of which takes priority the fight against sexism or the fight against capitalism. While some women do not accept the need for a mass movement and feel that the appropriate changes can be made by a few wily feminists, others condemn the research done by women in academic institutions of the State as impure and a cop out. Essentially we must realise that while research done by women for women will be ammunition for our fight, and that women's developing skills in any field is all grist to our mill, nevertheless, women's rights are only one side of the general movement and necessarily depend on the impetus and energy, arising from the solidarity and commitment of women to each other, as strength for its campaigns.

The basic struggle of the movement from consciousness to concrete activity depends on the continual process of trading in the old consciousness for a new; the women's movement will remain autonomous until the complete disappearance of sexism causes our shell of autonomy to crumble, nevertheless we must continually attempt to separate out the static nature of our demands existing alongside our oppression in time now from our commitment to the dynamic of the movement and our campaigns in time moving, in order to overthrow a system in which the very language and life-style of the status quo attempts to bury our aspirations of liberation in the shifting sands of our own false consciousness.

New Consciousness not False consciousness

Our new consciousness is built by synthesising on the one hand a rejection of our old consciousness, and on the other an understanding of its function in society, into a creative energy to build new situations out of old facts. It is false consciousness to make demands out of our old consciousness, for example things like the need for security, housework, success, the freedom of the individual. For while this might seem to provide us with answers, they rarely last.

The oppression of the housewife and the functioning of the family is the essential nerve centre of the new consciousness of women and provides a continuing impetus for struggle. But this is very different to saying that "the struggle of the housewife is central to the women's movement", (a well known quote). The latter statement is both a romanticisation and patronisation of the position of the housewife (all aptly sexist terms); a complete denial of her material conditions and hence of the movement itself. Hence it is politics based on a dream, to assume that a struggle or campaign can be fought in demanding a wage for housework. If a woman with a husband and children is being exploited, it is her ideological oppression that prevents her from reacting, and her material conditions that prevent her from acting for herself.. To merely "pay off" this situation would be to reify her position and to deepen the structure that she is already in.

The idea of "capitalising on sexism" could be seen as progressive, by ironing out the income differential between husband and wife, and thus defeudalising their relationship; but then they would still both be wage slaves within the capitalist system. It is already a right wing demand in some countries, and would presumably presuppose, owning a house, having a husband and children to feed, and regular visitations from an 'Inspector of Cleanliness'. For as we know, for the claimant and the unmarried mother in this welfare state, ^{in exchange} for a pittance to live on you are expected to show gratitude and moral penitence. While on the other hand, we also know that the assumption laid deep within sexism has been carried through to so-called socialist countries, where, even with a token system of equal pay women are still left in reality holding the baby.

It is of major importance for us to understand exactly how sexism is incorporated within capitalism. For while capitalism does not presuppose sexism (which was around long before) it adds strength to its exploitative powers. As feminists we can clearly see that while women are treated sexually as objects of ownership, human life can be distorted by property values, while women are not given equal education and opportunities meritocracies will have a meaning for everyone, while women don't vote (or have a vote but no voice), democracy is little more than a mask, while women don't get equal pay an 'aristocracy of labour' can continue to function and while child-birth is considered a semi-religious fact of female existence and children as an extension of mother, every institution in society will continue to flourish authoritarian values.

That seems to be our four demands again, but we still have the problem of their relationship to capitalism. Capitalism, as a system of commodity production and exchange in which the ownership of the means of production rests in the hands of the few who expropriate surplus value from the many, means a

worker 'freely' exchanges his labour time for a wage which is below the value of what he produces. The commodity is exchanged and his labour is universalised. A worker who does not exchange his labour time for a wage is not part of the capitalist mode of production, although the unemployed, the self-employed, children and housewives are all part of the capitalist system.

In order to understand what part the housewife plays in the system, we have spent much time in discussing whether housework produces surplus value, use value, or just more housework, as well as whether or not to get paid for it. Jean Gardiner in an unpublished paper 'The Political Economy and Female Labour in Capitalist Society' has explained very clearly that it makes little difference to the capitalist whether a man and his wife are both working for a wage (except in competition for labour I suppose), but 'it is on the question of the workers replacement in the next generation that the role of female labour becomes crucial' ... 'the effect of introducing children is to lower the standard of living of both parents relative to the number of hours worked and also possibly in absolute terms depending on whether the husband works for the same length of time and gets the same wage.'

So the role of 'Motherhood' is integral to capitalism: the housewife is busy providing for the next generation of healthy workers, sacrificing time and energy because she is "responsible" for seeing that they are best able to cope with their station in life. The housewife also blinds the husband to the wage/price differential, and the children to the fact that daddy is exploited. Daddy is meanwhile blinding mummy to the fact that his children's chances in life are unlikely to be any different from his, and the children to the fact his treatment of their mother is anything other than the norm. Thus the parents sacrifice their standard of living in order to give their children 'every opportunity in life', but are unlikely to make any effective change in the future of the child, and what is more, the more extreme the sacrifice, the more the parents will feel the need to impose self contradictory values on their children.

Money is not intrinsically vulgar, but wages for housework is vulgar economics. Like aid for underdevelopment, a wage for housework would be charity, (one of the subtlest forms for maintaining exploitation that exists.) Walter Rodney in his book 'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa' describes 'underdevelopment' as a word used by the bourgeois economists of imperialist nations, mainly, as a comparative term (used to compare the underdeveloped world with the so-called developed world):

Structural dependence is one of the characteristics of underdevelopment", and far from being a state natural to Africa it describes a process of exploitation. Similarly the process of exploitation known as 'housework' (a word used particularly by bourgeois socialists) is certainly not a state natural to women, but describes a situation of structural dependence, and is continually being compared with "real work". If it is this process of exploitation that we want to change then we should think rather less about housework, and more about the fact that it covers the reality of the work that women do in the home and with children. Why are we given the distinct impression that we are a nation of housewives, taking full social responsibility for our children but having none of that authority, invested in the institutions of the state, the schools, the local authorities, and the health services?

It is maybe because 'housework' and 'housewife' give an added focus to the bourgeois family; and so our efforts to organise community controlled child care are to off-load some of the responsibility from the individual woman. We do not make demands for the re-entrenchment of our position -our demands are elsewhere...

Actions

Human energy; sexual, intellectual and emotional, meets in the social arena, and it is here in particular that women in the movement who are at the point of reappropriation of their own energy, are becoming more and more aware of the distortions of other people in society, that play upon their oppression. A repression of the sexual and the emotional through the distorted intellectual posing of the ruling classes; a forum where the ideas of the working classes have very little currency, and those of women carry even less strength and so on. The very complexity of this mixture of languages, values and struggles makes co-ordinated activity difficult. But we share with the colonised that sense of slavery at a glance (or a whistle); we share with all labourers the intellectual frustration of servitude, and we are all non-starters in the race for freedom. Yet each group must set fire to the myths that consume them and release their own energy: we must all learn the strength of growing consciousness.

Our movement has grown through five national conferences, struggling with the structuring of meetings, waging offensives such as the Miss World campaign, working with the Night Cleaners Action Group, successfully defending our Family Allowances. We have set up women's study groups, women's centres, information centres and a wide range of 'activity groupings'. The movement remains autonomous to protect the growth of its own consciousness, yet all the time contradictions are thrown up resulting from our dynamic within society: of what we begin to expect for ourselves set against that which society still expects from us. In isolation that was our oppression, but as a movement it becomes our dynamic; we fight for what we want while yet reinforcing our solidarity with and trust in each other. We manifest our double struggle by joining unions and forming women's caucuses; as mothers, teachers, nurses, social workers, women are encouraged to create their own lives while bearing teaching and serving others. The women's movement has re-planted in the social arena the seeds of an alternative, with its demands.

The political space between the movement and the achievement of its demands incorporates many socialist demands: people before property (a basic living wage and free housing for all); the community before the individual, responsibility before authority, human health before human productivity, education from all to all. For our demands to come to fruition as we had envisaged them many, many other things would have to change too it seems. We are no longer the same voiceless participants in that social arena but conscious fighters towards a future we glimpse and may even touch, within the autonomy of the women's movement

Rob Hunter-Henderson

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Actions

Human energy; sexual, intellectual and emotional, meets in the social arena, and it is here in particular that women in the movement who are at the point of reappropriation of their own energy, are becoming more and more aware of the distortions of other people in society that play upon their oppression. A repression of the sexual and the emotional through the distorted intellectual posing of the ruling classes; a form where the ideas of the working classes have very little currency, and those of women carry even less strength and so on. The very complexity of this mixture of languages, values and struggles makes co-ordinated activity difficult. But we share with the colonized that sense of aliveness at a glance (or a whistle); we share with all laborers the intellectual frustration of servitude, and we are all non-starters in the race for freedom. Yet each group must set fire to the myths that consume them and release their own energy. We must all learn the strength of growing consciousness.

Our movement has grown through five national conferences, struggling with the structuring of meetings, working often as the Miss World campaign, working with the Night Cleaners Action Group, successfully defending our Family Allowances. We have set up women's study groups, women's centres, information centres and a wide range of 'activity groups'. The movement remains autonomous to protect the growth of its own consciousness, yet all the time contradictions are thrown up resulting from our dynamic within society: of what we begin to expect for ourselves set against that which society still expects from us. In isolation that was our oppression, but as a movement it becomes our dynamic; we fight for what we want while yet reinforcing our solidarity with and trust in each other. We manifest our double struggle by joining unions and forming women's centres; as mothers, teachers, nurses, social workers, women are encouraged to create their own lives while bearing teaching and serving others. The women's movement has re-planted in the social arena the seeds of an alternative with its demands.

The political space between the movement and the achievement of its demands incorporates many socialist demands: people before property (a basic living wage and free housing for all); the community before the individual, responsibility before authority, human health before human productivity, education for all to all. For our demands to come to fruition as we had envisaged them many other things would have to change too. We are no longer the same voiceless participants in that social arena but conscious fighters towards a future we glimpse and even touch within the autonomy of the women's movement.

WOMEN AND THE WAGE SYSTEM

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the discussion within the women's movement on the relationship of women as housewives and wage labourers to capital and the problem of organising the combined struggle against patriarchy and capitalism. In the last 18 months in this country the debate has to some extent polarised around the issue of the demand for wages for housework. The intention here is not so much to discuss the validity of this demand but rather to explore some of the issues it raises and to link it to wider problems socialists in the women's movement should be currently facing.

The discussion will be organised in the following sections:

1. The exploitation of women as housewives
2. The wage system and trade unionism
3. The nature of the struggle for specific demands in a capitalist society.

1. The Exploitation of Women as Housewives

Since the use of the term exploitation in this context may be confusing and appear to conflict with Marx's use of the term an explanatory note seems to be called for. In all modes of production based on class divisions, e.g. feudalism and capitalism the producers perform surplus labour i.e. they receive the equivalent of less than they produce, the surplus being appropriated by the ruling class. Marx in writing Capital was concerned with analysing the capitalist mode of production in its pure form (CMP) i.e. his model of society consisted of two classes only: on the one hand the capitalists who own the means of production; on the other the proletariat who own nothing but their labour power. All labour power under consideration falls into the category of either wage labour employed by capital or the reserve army of the unemployed from whose ranks wage labour is recruited by capital. Thus in this model all labour performed is translated into exchange value, i.e. embodied in commodities which are the property of capitalists. In the CMP the performance of surplus labour is synonymous with the creation of surplus value i.e. the production of commodities in excess of commodities entering the consumption of the workers. Thus Marx defined capitalist exploitation of labour as the creation of surplus value:

'The rate of surplus value is therefore an exact expression for the degree of exploitation of labour power by capital' (Capital, Vol.1, p.218)

For Marx exploitation referred at one and the same time to both the creation of surplus value and the performance of surplus labour which accrued to capital. But once one allows for other modes of production subordinate to the CMP within capitalist society and for forms of labour other than wage labour working for capital such as housework or peasant production, forms of surplus labour other than surplus value have to be taken into account. For the purposes of this paper therefore I take exploitation within capitalist society to refer to the performance of surplus labour in general accruing to capital.

What conclusions can be drawn from the debate within the movement concerning the nature of women's exploitation as housewives and their economic subordination to capitalist interests? Mariarosa Dalla Costa in 'Women and the Subversion of the

Community' argues that the separation of wage labour (factory and office) from non-wage labour (housework) which was a product of the emergence of capitalism is the basis in our society of the sex division of labour (The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community, p.22); in addition that the male wage labourer (husband) became the instrument of exploitation of the female non-wage labourer (wife) (p.29); that men appear the major beneficiaries of housework although in fact the capitalist class are, for housework is not so much a condition of personal slavery of women to men as a means of capital appropriating female non-wage labour:

'by the non-payment of a wage when we are producing in a world capitalistically organised, the figure of the boss is concealed behind that of the husband. He appears to be the sole recipient of domestic services, and this gives an ambiguous and slavlike character to housework' (p.33)

According to Dalla Costa therefore the demand for payment of a wage for housework exposes housework for what it is, namely "the very pillar of the capitalist organisation of work".

Dalla Costa's analysis of female exploitation is highly condensed but the above points seem to form the crux of her argument. I think it is helpful to analyse housework as a source of surplus labour performed by women and appropriate by capital (see below and my paper on the 'Political Economy of Female Labour in Capitalist Society'). However securing payment for housework is not sufficient, as Dalla Costa implies, to abolish its slavlike qualities.

For a woman is personally bound to her family for a multiplicity of reasons of which the following, amongst others, are clearly important. The first two are specific to women. The third and fourth bind men as well as women to their families.

- (i) Economic dependence of women arising from non-payment of housework and under-payment of female wage work.
- (ii) Housework represents care of individual people and thus commitment to those individual people becomes of central importance in a woman's life.
- (iii) The sharing of tasks and leisure time within the family satisfies emotional needs for which no real alternative exists for most people.
- (iv) The ideology of male responsibility and female supportiveness within the family.

Payment for housework affects the first factor only and would thus by no means eliminate the personal service aspect of housework nor the problems of organisation for the women's movement that flow from that.

In addition payment for housework would not on its own change it from non-wage to wage labour. Wage labour is characterised by freedom in the market and unfreedom in production whilst the opposite is true of housework. The wage labourer sells his labour power to the capitalist for a given number of hours during which time the capitalist has total control of that labour power and strives to make the maximum profit out of it. The housewife on the other hand is bound in theory for life to caring for her husband and family but the actual hours she works always appear to be her own to dispose of. It is her life which is controlled so her work does not have to be. The important point here can be illustrated by analogy with slave labour. It is not the payment of money to a man which turns him from a slave into a wage labourer. As a slave he is

in any case paid his keep although in terms of food rather than money. It is when he ceases to be the property of another man and gains the freedom to sell his labour power as his own property that he ceases to be a slave. Likewise the servitude inherent in housework does not disappear with a money payment for it although payment may well make that servitude more palatable. Dalla Costa in fact recognises this danger when she says:

'The demand... "pay us wages for housework" would run the risk of looking... as though we wanted further to entrench the condition of institutionalised slavery which is produced with the condition of housework.'
(p.34)

Turning to the question of how housework actually benefits capital this can be approached by seeing it as a mode of reproducing labour power. Within this process surplus labour of housewives is appropriated by capitalists because the exchange which takes place between the family and the capitalist mode of production, namely the sale of labour power, is an unequal exchange. It enables the capitalists to pay a lower wage to their workers, for a given standard of living, than they would have to if they were buying labour power from other capitalists and not the family. For capitalists do not have to pay their workers' wives for all the hours women spend maintaining and reproducing workers but only that part of the husband's wage packet which goes to the wife for herself which is often kept to a minimum because it is not seen to be hers by right. The point is that when a capitalist buys a commodity from another capitalist e.g. a machine, he pays both for the necessary labour embodied in the machine (i.e. the wages going to the workers who produced it) and the surplus labour in the machine (i.e. the profits going to the capitalist who sold it). On the other hand when the capitalist buys labour power produced within the family by the housewife's labour he pays for necessary labour only (that part of the wage packet going to the wife for her own consumption) and does not have to pay for the wife's surplus labour.

Thus just as wage labourers perform surplus labour for capitalists because they work longer hours producing commodities for the capitalists than they actually need to work in order to maintain and reproduce themselves so housewives perform surplus labour for capitalists since they work longer hours maintaining and reproducing labour power than they need to work merely to maintain and reproduce themselves. However the mechanism by which surplus labour is appropriated by capital in each case is different. In the case of the wage labourer the capitalist directly controls the work and by that means forces the worker to work harder than he need to maintain his standard of living. In the case of the housewife the surplus labour is forced from her because she is personally bound to her husband and family and to caring for them. She thus procures for them a standard of living incomparably higher than the husband's wage could command in the market for capitalistically produced commodities. In the process she directly contributes to making labour power cheaper for capital and profits higher than they would be if capital itself were responsible for producing labour power instead of the family, on the assumption, that is, of a given technology and a given level of employment of wage labour.

It is clearly not always the case that it is more profitable

for the production of labour power to be organised within the family. In periods when the demand for wage labour is sufficiently high it will be more profitable for housewives to become wage labourers and for a greater proportion of the production of labour power to be carried out by capital or the state, accompanied by pressure for greater technical efficiency (e.g. canteens replacing family meals). The family in its role of producer of labour power has clearly undergone significant changes with the historical development of capitalism, e.g. development of state education and there is no reason to suppose that the form it currently takes is any more definitive from the point of view of capital than previous ones.

The important point that is being argued here is that non-wage labour within the family is a source of surplus labour for capital as well as wage labour and that the relative contributions of the different spheres of labour to capitalist profits will depend on the conditions of capitalist accumulation ruling at a particular time.

An important implication of this analysis is that the introduction of a money payment for housework would by no means necessarily give back to housewives the labour they are currently performing for capital. If the payment to wives was taxed back from husbands' wage packets neither the wife nor her family would be any better off and both wife and husband would still be performing surplus labour for capital. This problem will be taken up again in the next section.

2. The Wage System and Trade Unionism

" Since Marx, it has been clear that capital rules and develops through the wage, that is that the foundation of capitalist society was the wage labourer and his or her direct exploitation. What has been neither clear nor assumed by the organisations of the working class movement is that precisely through the wage has the exploitation of the non-wage labourer been organised. This exploitation has been even more effective because the lack of a wage hid it. That is, the wage commanded a larger amount of labour than appeared in factory bargaining. Where women are concerned, their labour appears to be a personal service outside of capital." (Dalla Costa, p.26)

Women are in fact exploited through the wage system in three different ways:

- (i) As wage labourers
- (ii) As low paid wage labourers
- (iii) As non-wage labourers.

The first form of exploitation only was analysed in depth by Marx in Capital. In fact amongst wage labourers rates of exploitation vary with the strength of organisation of specific groups of workers. The majority of women are super-exploited as low paid wage labourers for a multiplicity of reasons not least of which being the policies of excluding women from employment adopted by highly organised male workers. Finally, the labour of women as housewives is not even recognised through the wage system as labour.

It is the domination of labour by capital through the wage system which revolutionary socialists strive to abolish. Yet the major form of collective organisation of labour which has developed to struggle against capitalist exploitation,

namely trade unionism, by its very nature both recognises and upholds the wage system. Moreover the class of workers most involved in trade unionism are politically crucial to the revolution because of their strategic position in production. This contradiction seems to be a central factor underlying the ambivalence felt in the women's movement towards trade unionism. It seems really important for us to get to grips with what we see as the limitations of trade unionism and what arguments we should put forward as revolutionary feminists and socialists related to the trade union movement.

Trade unionism is not itself revolutionary. It operates within the confines of capitalism. It developed as the organisation on a sectional basis of groups of wage labourers. In its most progressive phases its major objective has been to struggle against capitalist exploitation, the struggle taking the form of a fragmented struggle for higher wages. But the struggle for higher wages both forces workers in practice to recognise the wage system as such and, insofar as it is successful for particular groups, reinforces the ideology that the wage system evaluates people's labour in accordance with what it is worth to society. It thus reinforces the divisions between high paid and low paid, between wage work and non-wage work, between men and women. Trade unionism therefore both ameliorates some of the worst aspects of the wage system and at the same time reinforces others. It limits the degree of exploitation for specific groups of workers and spreads by example to a wider and wider range of workers (e.g. recently most rapid growth of unionisation has been amongst white collar workers). On the other hand insofar as it remains partial, i.e. excludes many workers, greater protection for some workers implies fiercer competition and greater relative rates of exploitation amongst the unorganised. Moreover exclusion of large groups of workers is at least partially due to the nature of trade unionism itself which evolves always to protect the membership and not to take into account the interests of workers in general (e.g. the insistence of male craft munitions workers in the First World War that female replacements should receive equal pay with the men was for purposes of protecting male rates only not for raising the general level of women's pay).

Trade unionism does not concern itself in general with areas of struggle between capital and labour other than the wage bargain. This seriously limits its effectiveness in reducing overall exploitation. For the struggle over workers' income in real terms is waged at several levels:

- (i) The money wage bargain between wage labour and capital
- (ii) Prices set by capitalists
- (iii) Taxation and social benefits set by the state
- (iv) Real consumption based on the wife's organisation of the family budget.

It is only at the first level that the organisation of the workers is at all developed in the form of trade unionism. But what workers actually receive is not determined solely by the wage bargain but is affected by the struggle at all other levels which has become increasingly important over time in response to the development of trade union organisation. Moreover whilst the organised workers at the first level face capitalists who are largely unorganised, at the other three levels the workers individually in their families, and especially women as housewives, face the capitalist class as a whole either through the price mechanism or via the state.

No form of economistic struggle i.e. struggle to increase the income of a section of workers, whether it is a struggle for higher wages or a struggle for higher family allowances, can increase the total income going to workers as a whole. The basic assumption of capitalist society is that profits must always be maintained. Trade unionism does not challenge this assumption and is therefore strictly limited in its ability to fight to lower the exploitation of the working classes as a whole. There have, however, been fluctuations in political awareness within the trade unions. In periods of economic crisis or political upheaval the limitations of struggle at the level of wages only have been recognised e.g. during the Second World War pressures developed from within the trade union movement for state provision for welfare. However it is not clear that greater political awareness has coincided with any real attack on patriarchal attitudes.

It is not at all obvious what conclusions can be drawn from all this except to stress that the wage system exploits all workers, although some to a greater extent than others, and that it is the wage system that must therefore be attacked rather than trade unionism as such. We need instead to develop a clearer idea of both the limitations and the importance of trade unionism.

3. The Nature of the Struggle for Specific Demands in Capitalist Society

What kind of revolutionary struggle is it possible to wage in a period when the society is not itself at a revolutionary stage, when many people are aware of their exploitation but see no way of changing it? Statements like the following:

"When one set of workers succeeds in winning something by struggle, they (the state) threaten that other workers must take less. But there is no cake, there is no budget there is only the wealth which we have made and which they have stolen." (S. James, The Family Allowance Campaign: Tactic and Strategy)

fail to recognise that as long as society is ruled by capitalist interests the state has the power to prevent workers increasing their share of wealth. It therefore seems crucial for us to be clear about both the effects of getting demands we put forward implemented within the framework of a capitalist society and the role of struggling for the implementation of demands within that context from the point of view of building a revolutionary movement.

For example, if the state is committed to keeping down wages and welfare spending as a whole and we demand higher family allowances we know this will either mean an increase in taxation of wages or a reduction somewhere else in welfare spending. That does not mean we should not fight for higher family allowances since failure to do so would imply compliance in the process of capital recouping profits by squeezing women with children. But it does mean questioning a campaign for higher family allowances fought in isolation from other issues. This becomes especially obvious when one takes into account the use which reactionary groups make of such demands. (See for example an article in the Sunday Times Business News, July 22, 1973 which argued for higher family allowances, financed by higher taxes, on the grounds that "Strikers" wives are just as important as union officials.")

The main point of our campaigns in fact seems to be twofold. On the one hand their importance lies in the struggle they generate and their role in building a mass feminist movement i.e. do they actively mobilise women not previously mobilised. On the other hand demands have a value in themselves when their implementation increases women's self confidence and the control they have over their own lives and facilitates women's economic independence or reduce the amount of time-consuming, isolating work they have to do. Certain campaigns also provide greater scope for developing ongoing organisation amongst women than others e.g. campaigns for collective child care facilities bring women (and hopefully men) together on a long term basis whilst wages for housework retain women's isolation.

In conclusion there are two further questions raised by the debate about wages for housework which have appeared important in the process of writing this. Firstly it raises the important point : Why should anyone do work without getting paid for it? However we need to go beyond that to point out that the wage system exploits all workers including those who get paid wages. Secondly it raises the question of whether or not we are really committed to abolishing the sex division of labour. In fact, within the feminist movement there appears to be a split between those who wish to preserve feminine tasks as such but who wish to see them given greater social recognition and remuneration and those who wish to abolish the division of labour between the sexes and the degradation of male/female relations which follows from that.

Jean Gardiner, August, 1973.

The main point of our campaign is that we are to be twofold. On the one hand their importance lies in the struggle they generate and their role in building a mass feminist movement. i.e. they actively mobilize women not previously mobilized. On the other hand we have a value in themselves when their implementation increases women's self confidence and the control they have over their own lives and facilitates women's economic independence or reduces the amount of time-consuming, isolating work they have to do. Certain campaigns also provide greater scope for developing ongoing organization amongst women than others e.g. campaigns for collective child care facilities bring women (and hopefully men) together on a long term basis whilst wages for housework retain women's isolation.

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John Gellner, August 1977.

THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT AND THE PRESENT CRISIS OF
BRITISH CAPITALISM: A PROPOSAL FOR ACTION

The theoretical activity of the women's movement has forced the debate about the relationship between women's liberation and socialism far beyond the stage described in Sheila Rowbotham's 'Women, Resistance and Revolution' where women's liberation - or rather 'women's rights' - was added to socialist programmes as a result of a moral decision that this struggle should be linked to the struggle for socialism. It has taken the development of the Women's Liberation Movement to produce, or at least begin to produce, a theory of the integral relationship between capitalism and women's oppression, and thus to demonstrate the objective basis of the revolutionary potential of the struggle for women's liberation. The basic conclusion of these theoretical beginnings is that the role of women in the reproduction of labour power within the bourgeois family is the fundamental mechanism by which the sexual division of labour within capitalist society and with it the oppression of women is perpetuated and developed. It follows from this that the struggle for women's liberation has the character of a permanent revolution; that is, liberation cannot be achieved within one segment of society, and this struggle is necessarily part of the revolutionary process.

Discussion of this objective relationship between women's liberation and the revolutionary process is already fairly thoroughly under way. Here, I want to make some suggestions about how to deal with the next problem, the concrete one of how this objective relationship can be achieved, how this revolutionary potential can be realised in the women's liberation movement in Britain. What strategic implications, in terms of campaigns, demands & forms of organisation, must we draw from the theory of women's oppression that demonstrates its integral relationship with capitalist society via the structural position of women in the bourgeois family?

One possible answer would be that we should hammer away solely at demands that hit directly at this basic structure, that is, demands for the socialisation of housework. There are two related things wrong with this. Firstly, it takes no account of the complexity of women's oppression and women's consciousness. In particular it does not recognise that although women's role in the sphere of reproduction is the basic mechanism explaining women's oppression in capitalism this does not mean that all aspects of women's oppression e.g. in work, education, etc. can be reduced to it. Once one has located this central mechanism the next step is to understand the specific ways in which this structural position combines with other social structures e.g. the education system, the productive system, types of trade union organisation, etc. to produce very differentiated forms of women's oppression and consciousness. An example of what this means strategically can be taken from another, in some ways analogous, situation: effective movements for national liberation rarely mobilise people on the basis purely of the demand for withdrawal of the imperial power. A precondition of the successes of for example, Partido Africano da Independencia da Guine e Cabo Verde (PAIGC) was Cabral's analysis of the specific forms that colonial oppression took among particular social groups, the way it combined with other social structures to make some contradictions more dominant than others, some demands closer to the consciousness of specific peasant groups than others.

Secondly, even if demands relating to all the different contexts of women's oppression are added to those on socialised housework there still remain the dangers - which were probably in the 'four demands' approach of the early days of the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) - of not taking into account in the formulation of campaigns and strategy the specific features of the general situation that we are acting in. This would involve an analysis of the crisis of capitalist social relations in this period (not only the economic dimension of this crisis), and of the nature of government strategy vis a vis the sphere of reproduction and the position of women.

Although I have just stressed the differentiated forms of women's oppression its structural unity must not be lost sight of. This is not only for reasons of theoretical clarity but because of the strategic implications of this unity. A practice which was based on the idea of women's oppression as merely a series of negligibly related fragments would be disastrous for the political development of the movement. An example from the earlier development of the WLM and is still to some extent operative which tended towards this practice is an overcompartmentalisation of "work issues" and "home issues". Of course there are differences in starting point and focus between struggles on equal pay and those on child care, but it follows from the idea of women's oppression as a structural unity that an equal pay campaign, for e.g. is never simply a campaign on the question of equal pay. To treat it as such in our agitation around it would be to miss many political opportunities to facilitate the co-option of the struggle by both employers and the trade union bureaucracy. Instances of unequal pay cannot be fully understood and struggled against, without understanding the total situation of the women involved, specifically, without analysing the way that their oppression in the family and the mystifications that surround it generate continual obstacles to their self organisation against their employers and the government. In different degree of visibility the issues of socialised housework, sexist ideology among the employers, the unions, in the media and in the home are involved in every industrial struggle. They must be brought explosively into the open through extending campaigns to deal with other aspects of sexism in the work place, e.g. as the French shop assistants extended their pay struggle to organise against the way they had to dress, look and behave according to the managers' idea of what would most please the customers and boost profits; to take the consciousness generated in the initially industrial struggle on to the streets to campaign for child care facilities. To bring these frequently latent issues into the open when a struggle is focused initially on only one aspect, there is a necessity for the self organisation of women as well as their organisation within trade unions. This self organisation would probe and act on the total oppression of women in a way in which trade unions, with their inherent sectoralisation of different areas of working class life, would be unable to do.

A further strategic implication of the way in which women's oppression is integral to capitalist society is that our plans for action must always be based on a full analysis of the present tendencies in capitalism as a whole. We are not struggling in a vacuum, as a liberal approach would imply. We need to understand in detail the strategy of our enemies, the concerns and responses of our possible allies, the dominant needs and forms of consciousness of other women.

To spell this out more fully: we need an analysis of the present situation which sketches out the main components of the present crisis of capitalist social relations and then focuses on 1) discovering in what contexts women's role in the reproduction of labour power combines with her position in other structures e.g. the labour force, the education system, and with features of the social crisis e.g. inflation, in such a way that the contradictions are most explosive and consciousness has the greatest possibility of breaking with the ideological mystifications of the past. One example is that of the situation of women in the late 1960s who because of the vast expansion in higher education had been through higher education and in doing so developed aspirations incompatible with the subordinate roles that they were expected to play in all aspects of social life. This combined with the more general crisis in bourgeois ideology which had many ramifications for the family and sexuality laid the conditions for the emergence of the women's liberation movement. Another example might be that of the night cleaners which illustrates many of the contradictions in the ways that oppression in the family interlinks with exploitation and oppression at work. In the present period the specific way in which women's oppression is intensified by rapidly rising prices is another example. I will go into this latter idea in more detail below. This kind of analysis should guide us in deciding what issues should be priorities in particular localities and/or at particular times. With perhaps the exception of the Family Allowance campaign, our choice of campaigns and priorities has tended to be rather arbitrary; 2) Analysing and evaluating the various moves being made in relation to women, from outside the WLM, frequently to diffuse or co-opt it. Particularly important here are the strategy of the government, a most pertinent example here is family allowances, if, from the beginning we had analysed the specific policy on family allowances by looking at it in the wider context of the tax credit system and more generally the Tory governments' attempt to solve British capitalism's crisis of profitability at the cost of the living standards of the working class then the living standards of the working class then the campaign would not have been so easily diffused by the latest product of the Tory "think tank" which apart from the child credits being paid to the mother is by no means a victory. Thatcher's nursery proposals are another important example and here we must pay particular attention (as begun by Angela Weir in Red Rag) to the likely initiatives of the government to follow other European Economic Community countries in "rationalising" the somewhat anarchic sphere of reproduction and moving towards a closer articulation of policies in this area with other social and economic policies. Also important are the manoeuvres of the Labour party, their latest lever seems to be the Anti-Discrimination Bill which they will make a much publicised part of their election platform. At present it seems that we are likely to be outflanked by the Labour party unless we work out ways of changing radically the present nature of the campaign, extending its demands and subverting its parliamentarist tactics. We must also pay more attention to the omissions and the gestures of the Trade Union leadership. There are continual sporadic indications of a far reaching discontent among women within the Trade Unions but to relate to this we need a far more detailed picture of exactly what is happening to the different unions; an immediate issue that perhaps some people at this conference could start work on is the lack of a demand for full equal pay in the Engineers pay claim. This general focus should both guide

the content of our campaigns and how we orient towards organisations such as the trade unions and the Labour Party.

The present crisis, inflation, and how it effects women

Increasingly since the 60s British capitalism has been going through a deepening crisis of profitability. Through government intervention it has used two combined strategies to temporarily halt this crisis and regain satisfactory profit margins. Firstly it attempts to increase the rate of exploitation by shackling the trade unions and breaking down working class combativity at the point of production. This is done either through integrationist measures as tried initially by the Labour government or through directly repressive measures, e.g. Industrial Relations Act, arrest of picketing workers, etc. Secondly, employers, by raising prices, increase their profit margins at the expense of workers real wages. The fake "price freeze" is exposed daily as virtually unprecedented rises are announced over the media for every essential household good especially food; these announcements are frequently in addition to the continual increases that are visible in every supermarket. Food prices have been rising at a rate of 21.5% a year under Tory "controls".

This aspect of the crisis (inflation) has a specific effect on women by exacerbating the contradictions already in their situation. Because of her structural position she bears the brunt of price rises. This is not simply a question of it being women who do the shopping although that is part of it. Rapid inflation qualitatively intensifies the oppressive nature of all aspects of her role in the family. To put it crudely, she has to reproduce the same amount of labour power with lower means of subsistence.

What is involved in this can be seen in the following list of how different parts of the material (as distinct from ideological) aspect of the central function of women in the family are made more oppressive by inflation.

Womens' role in the reproduction of labour power involves:

- 1) Shopping - this is made more harassing by the fact that one has to shop around more than usual and has to buy small amounts at frequent intervals because one can no longer afford the necessary initial outlay to buy in bulk. Also, it is women who directly experience the irrational, as far as the working class is concerned, process of price rises.
- 2) Cooking - more cooking and preparation of food has to be done to produce equally nutritious meals on less money; good time saving meals are always more expensive and "take away" meals which were sometimes a regular means of preserving some of ones own time become rare treats.
- 3) Washing - it becomes more and more difficult to afford the launderette, the cost of cleaning materials has almost doubled in the last year; paying hire purchase on a washing machine is virtually out of the question. So more time has to be spent on doing the washing by hand.
- 4) Looking after the children - it becomes more difficult to keep them tolerably amused since all the usual means of doing so (given the lack of adequate child care facilities) play groups, ice creams, sweets, toys, outings etc. get squeezed out of the family budget.

Lastly, because of women's dependent position within the family she is forced by inflation into a continual situation of nagging her husband for a greater portion of the rapidly diminish-

ing real value of the wage packet.

It is not surprising therefore that historically it has almost invariably been women who have taken a collective initiative on prices. In Nottingham in 1812 they lead various imaginative actions, demonstrating against the price of flour. They occupied bakeries and then sold the bread at the pre-rise prices or lower. Sheila Rowbotham describes how in France just before the march to Versailles "the women were growing impatient with what they felt to be the men's ineffectiveness. The bread crisis was peculiarly their own. In September they stopped carts and besieged the town hall. On 5th October the revolt started from several markets. In 1792 and 93 laundresses from the Faubourg Saint-Antoine invaded grocers' shops. And there are many more examples of similar actions."

In the present period we could again take the initiative. Our oppression is intensified by inflation and we cannot just leave the problem to action at the point of production. The Tory government cannot be defeated solely by militant wage claims. I'm not however counterposing traditional forms of "consumer action" to trade union struggle. Rather the proposal is intended as a way of developing a new unity among the working class and other oppressed groups in this immediate situation. The present type of 'unity' of the working class which trade union leaders often use demagogically against militant independent initiatives by women, blacks and gay people, is extremely precarious so long as the real fragmentation imposed on the working class via, among other structures, the bourgeois family is not struggled against. One central way in which the family produces this fragmentation is through the privatisation of social conflicts. This is particularly the case with inflation. It is obviously women, by whose subordination the fragmentation of the working class is maintained who must take the initiative in the new stronger unity. Through women organising themselves against inflation they are turning the conflicts that it causes into a political campaign instead of either rows within the working class family about how the diminishing budget should be allocated or the ideological mobilisation of women against working class militancy.

The question of preventing price rises is ultimately a governmental question and involves the exercise of definite state powers. But that does not mean that the only solution is to wait for, or campaign for a labour government pledged to introduce a price freeze. Rather, we can take immediate initiatives to campaign for local district and county councils, especially Labour councils, to impose a price freeze on all essential items sold in their locality. These campaigns should be seen as part of a campaign to get the government to introduce such a freeze on a national scale. Councils should pass emergency orders to do this and organise women and trade unionists into a policing force, e.g. by giving them powers to carry out spot checks or even employing people for this purpose. Councils such as Clay Cross could take exemplary initiatives to show what could be done. To have any success in such a campaign, militant actions such as occupations, mass "shop ins", temporary boycotts of shops and supermarkets whose prices are going up particularly fast should be initiated. The purpose of these actions would not be to achieve a permanent reduction of prices but to mobilise people in support of the campaign to get the council to impose a price freeze. The campaign should also aim

to get workers in the public sector to begin to implement the demand for a price freeze in a particular locality. Workers in gas and electricity could build links of struggle with consumers by refusing to cut off supplies to groups of consumers refusing, in an organised manner, to pay electricity or gas bills in protest to collect fares, allowing the public to travel free for a limited period, or refusing to charge fare increases, as a sanction by workers in support of consumer demands for fare stabilisation could be useful forms of struggle. Also one could extend the campaign to issues which have immediate relevance in the context of inflation such as demands for free public transport and free launderettes subsidised by Council levies on local manufacturers.

To initiate this campaign women's liberation groups could take steps towards setting up a prices campaign committee which should include as much trade union support as possible. To start the price committee we should not simply send leaflets to the Women's Liberation group mailing list and contact sympathetic shop stewards etc. for a meeting to set up such a committee. We should agitate among women by speaking about inflation and giving out leaflets in shopping precincts, street meetings, bingo halls, community centre's womens groups etc.; we could hold preparatory meetings on a large number of housing estates and areas to get together a core of women in each area. This would all be in preparation for a big public meeting or day conference to actually set up the price committee. To prepare for this meeting we would also attempt to get the support of the Trades Council, local Trade Unions and the local Labour party. This support should take a very material form, that is the price committee should be able to use the facilities of the Trades Council and Trade Unions via a separate office for the price committee, finance for a full-time or several part-time workers for the price committee, child care facilities (there are in almost every town vast unoccupied rooms belonging to the Labour party which could be demanded for child care.)

Because of the way that inflation intensifies the specific oppression of women within the family; because the Trade Unions are unlikely to themselves take an initiative, and because women have already started taking action this campaign could be a way of both extending and developing the women's movement and in doing so strengthening the offensive against the Tory government. (By focusing on the government I am not arguing that it is the cause of all oppression but rather that in the present period it is British capitalism's centralising tool of oppression and exploitation.)

Hilary Wainwright

WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK - WHAT IS IT BASED UPON, AND WHAT ARE ITS IMPLICATIONS?

In discussing the Wages For Housework campaign it is necessary to see that it operates within a distinct political framework. Selma James in the bulk of her writings and in those who generally support the positions that she puts forward attempt to differentiate this framework and their use of Marxism from the left "male dominated groups". As Selma James states, she sets out to "analyse Marxism from the point of view of women, rather than women from the point of view of Marxism.", and presents her conclusions as a series of "breakthroughs" for the women's struggle.

What are these theoretical breakthroughs? They basically stem from a new analysis of the relations of housework to the categories of productive and non-productive labour. Selma James claims to improve the potential power of women by the discovery that domestic labour is productive labour i.e. that women produce surplus value. However the Marxist distinction between productive and non-productive labour is not based on a moral evaluation that one is more socially useful than the other. No-one is denying that women work hard or that they produce values, and that their work is necessary to the smooth running of capitalism. What we are attempting to do is to establish what is the precise relation of the woman in the home to capital and therefore what is her potential power and best way of organising. The woman in the home creates use-values i.e. expends labour usefully in the endless round of household activities ... cooking, cleaning, etc. making the situation possible where the husband (and eventually the children) can sell his labour power to the capitalist in return for a wage, the application of his labour power reproducing the value of the wage and thereafter surplus value for the capitalist. However, Selma James draws on the emotional argument that women work hard to prove an unconnected and differing point, that women stand in a direct relation to capital as producers of surplus value. Rather than this reassuring and up-valuing the position of women in the home, it weakens it by mystifying it. However by equating the housewives' relation to capital with that of the wage labourer the demand for a wage follows naturally enough, though unfortunately unwaged labour does not become waged labour by merely putting a tag on it.

What is the importance of establishing that domestic labour should be waged? The importance for Selma James that domestic labour should receive a wage is that for her a wage implies social recognition. However, when pushed she concedes that she is not particularly concerned what such a payment is termed, as long as women get the money, because money is power. However, money does not equal power. The power of the capitalist class rests not on their relation to money, but on their relationship to the means of production. Waged labourers have industrial power i.e. bargaining power in relation to money and conditions because they are organised at the point of production, and are directly necessary for the production of surplus value.

Having defined the potential power of the proletariat in its relationship to capital we must analyse the particular position of women in order finally to refute Selma James's attacks that Marxists regard women as outside the capitalist relations of production. However, in doing this we must avoid and point out the mistakes that Selma James herself makes. These largely follow from her analysis of the family (which is based on that of Dalla Costa). This is to reduce the exploitation and oppression of women to the family and more particularly to that of the housewife - "the family

is the very pillar of the capitalist organisation of work...the role of the working class housewife, which we believe has been indispensable to capitalist production, is the determinant for the position of all other women. Every analysis of women as a caste then, must proceed from the position of the working class housewives".

In drawing attention to one general condition of women at the expense of ignoring the vast differences according to social class and in ignoring the role of women in the work-force, this analysis has a particularly distorting effect. It very much depends on what particular social relations that women find themselves as to what response to and what emphasis they themselves place on their position in the family. An understanding of this is essential if we are to find the key into the issues around which women are actually radicalising. (This point will be developed later on). Having made the point that women enter into other social relations than those within the family and that the relation of super-exploitation in the factory for example, might provide their point of radicalisation rather than (though not divorced from) their position in the family - it is necessary to look at the potential power of women who are not part of the waged work force.

Although women in the home do not produce surplus value, they are necessary for its realisation because they are importantly placed in the relations of consumption. As Marx points out production and consumption are but different aspects of one unit. The organisation of women around the aspect of consumption may provide women with an extremely important social force. (However this will be taken up more fully in another document).

Aims and Implications

Having looked at some of the theoretical premises upon which Wages For Housework is based the next section will attempt to examine the aims and implications of the campaign. There is some confusion in the writings on wages for housework whether it is a demand, which can or cannot be realised under capitalism, or a strategy or what. However it is unanimously acclaimed as an issue that can mobilise all women. This makes the Wages For Housework campaign falsely attractive because it seems to solve in one blow how to organise all women in all social relations, facing all their different forms of oppression.

How precisely will this organisation of women affect their position in the family?

One of the main tactics proposed in the campaign is the strike tactic. The use of this tactic however would ignore the essential differences between privatised domestic labour and socialised waged labour. The waged labourer is already organised by and at his work place. He strikes as part of the collective workforce, immediately depriving the capitalist of his ability to extract surplus value. This process however cannot be mechanically transposed to the situation of the privatised domestic labourer. The housewife could strike as an individual, and the immediate effect would be to deprive her own family members of her own class - of the care and provisions necessary to them. Only after a long period, during which the family would increasingly suffer could such a strike effect the capitalist class. Another point to be made is that the proletariat gain a wage increase by increasing the proportion of necessary value (wages) relative to surplus value, i.e. a higher proportion of the goods that they produce goes to the workers rather than the capitalist. Because women in the home do not produce commodities, however, their wages would have

to be levied from society as a whole. The capitalist state, because of its function to protect the interests and profits of the capitalist class would only grant such a demand by forcing the working class to foot the bill, through cuts in welfare benefits and increased taxation. (the Wages For Housework campaign provides no concrete steps that could be taken to prevent this from being the case).

Wages for Housework supporters also argue that such a wage would not further cement women into the role of housewives, but would rather liberate them from it. Whilst correctly pointing to the specific form of oppression that women suffer in the home, they conclude from this that the central point of struggle should be within the family. (Della Costa "Clearly, the specific form of exploitation represented by domestic work demands correspondingly, specific form of struggle, namely the women's struggle within the family). However this is to ignore that the family as a privatised unit is an extremely weak arena for struggle. But more importantly in taking up the question of the nature of the work done in the home we should make as our starting point not its recognition, for in practice that will have the effect of orientating women towards the home, but how do we abolish it? This requires an orientation towards the socialisation of domestic tasks, where the fight for and realisation of such demands, e.g. community controlled nurseries will help women break from their domestic ties.

It is worth considering how even the gaining of a wage would effect women's role within the family. Selma James argues that wages would give access to transportation and enable them to ensure that their children were cared for while they carried on the struggle for women's liberation. Practically speaking, that means that they could hire a child-minder - individually or collectively - or perhaps take the kids with them. However, this in no way challenges the doctrine of the bourgeois family that the care of the children is the responsibility of the parents only. Nor does it alter the role of the family in reinforcing the authority relations of bourgeois society, by giving parents the power to determine the activity and ideology of their children, with an unavoidable bias in the direction of the individual interests of the parents. These, however, are the very roles which the Womens Liberation Movement wishes to challenge, not only in its propaganda, but in its practice.

Selma James also claims that wages would give women the power to dictate the terms on which creches would be established in the future. If these wages are to be used as money this could only mean that women would use their power as consumers in boycotting campaigns for example, or actually use their wages as capital to finance the cost of providing community creche facilities. This latter course of action supports rather than challenges the notion that parents rather than the state are responsible for financing the care and education of children and sees women joining the capitalist class in order to defeat it.

Wages for Housework as a Method of Struggle

In the Wages for Housework campaign, Selma James proposes a method of struggle which not only at its inception opposes the interests of housewives to those of most other members of the working class, but in no way alters the objective position of women in society. It wrongfully presupposes that women form a monolithic bloc unrelated to the class struggle as a whole, with exactly the same problems facing them in exactly the same way at any given time, and therefore open to a single solution. The "money is power" argu-

ment, which drastically misdirects the campaign, is erroneously based on the skewed analysis that capitalists have state power because they control all the money, and the strongest sections of the unions have power because they are the highest paid, therefore all that holds back the power of women is money. However, the power of women lies in their ability to organise around the questions in which they are intimately involved. To carry this through we need the flexibility of approach which understands that various sectors of women face particularly crucial issues at particular times, whilst organising these struggles in such a way as to improve the objective position and power of that sector of women as a whole and the working class as a whole.

The conception of the Wages for Housework campaign is based on a highly dangerous stagist theory of first ideological change and then a real challenge to capitalist social relations, which would most likely result in providing a material incentive for maintaining the present role of the family.

The force of these points hopefully will rule out Wages For Housework as a strategy for the Women's Liberation Movement. In this period, when so many women are involved in the production process, when the government is attacking the working class as consumers as much as wage labourers, when the working class as a whole is moving into militant opposition to the capitalist offensive, there will open up for women methods of struggle which begin to end their social isolation on a day-to-day basis, and which increases their weight inside the working class as a whole.

Ann Foreman

Linda Simon

(IMG)

THE PERSPECTIVE OF WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK

We in the Power of Women Collective who are organising on wages for housework base our perspective on the unwaged condition of the housewife. Her condition is the lowest common denominator for all women; through it we are all defined and imprisoned, black and white, working class and middle class, "supported" and "unsupported", unwaged and partially waged. We begin with the housewife because her unwaged condition is our fundamental weakness. If this unwaged condition is our basic weakness, our perspective must be to deal with that. While the discussion in our small groups has always centred on the family and the woman's role within it, this fact has not been reflected in the politics or the organisational practice of our movement. The perspective of wages for housework does that for the first time. It aims at power for women to destroy their dependence on men and therefore to destroy their destiny as housewife.

We are not proposing, as others do, that the alternative to housework is factory work. These are two aspects of forced labour which we have to do because we need the money that capital gives us, either directly or through men, in order to live. This money we can get only by working in the home or out of it, but it is not payment for that work. It is just enough to subsist on so that we can continue to do that work. When we demand wages for housework what we are saying is that we need the money and we don't need the work. We are not proposing a productivity deal; we are not a trade union.

The question has come up that if we get a wage for housework we will have to do the work more thoroughly and put up with time and motion study men (or women). That so many people raise this question shows that they do not see the struggle of the houseworker as having the same objective as the struggle of the factory worker, that is, not to do forced labour, in the home or in the factory. Maybe they can't imagine that women can make as anti-capitalist a struggle as men, and will always have to trade more money for more work. But the fact that factory workers will be offered a productivity deal doesn't prevent them from demanding a wage increase. The question is: are they strong enough to refuse more work? Nobody says: don't demand the money because you may be offered a productivity deal. Everybody says: go for more money and less work at the same time. That's what we as women propose to do.

The same principle applies to the question of where the money is to come from. We would never tell factory workers not to demand more money because capital will try to get it back from other workers. We say, as waged workers say, let it come from profits.

The struggle for liberation is the struggle for power. Does anyone believe that if we are strong enough to demand and win a wage for housework that when the time and motion study man (or woman) knocks at the door, any of us will let him in? In a rent strike when the collector comes he gets the door slammed in his face.

But we are not sold on one way of demanding wages for housework. There are many ways that the demand can be expressed. If we organise a creche in our street and demand that the council pay for it, that is wages for housework.

In fact, there is no part of a woman's life which is not founded in women's wagelessness in the home and therefore no place where a struggle for money can't be made. The perspective of wages for housework uncovers the woman's complete work week, in the factory and in the kitchen. The fragmented life of a woman with its seemingly separate compartments is for the first time seen as a totality through the perspective of wages for housework. For example, we want control over our bodies, but this control is the power to demand birth control that works, that doesn't pollute our bodies; having children when we want them without dooming us to dependence on a man and to slavery in the home, and being able to raise children without constant financial worry and housing crisis; without having to be confined to heterosexuality; without having our arms and legs trained to follow the rhythms of an assembly line. "What about the children we want and can't afford? We are forced to demand abortion and sterilisation as we have been forced to demand jobs. Give us money and give us time, and we will be in a better position to control our bodies, our minds and our relationships". (Women, the Unions and Work or What Is Not To Be Done, p.16)

To demand money is to determine the grounds of the struggle. We agree with Marx that money is "universal social power" and this the ruling class knows as well as we do. In the context of demanding a wage, we're in a stronger position to get the work off our backs, and in a stronger position too to determine the terms on which this work is socialised. We don't want capitalism to socialise housework as it has socialised factory work and as it is socialising child care. We're fighting to socialise housework on our terms, not in order to take another job outside the home. The free time we win belongs to us.

The struggle for a wage for housework is the struggle to work less in the factory as well as in the home. It is because so much of her work is unwaged that the woman is in such a weak position in the factory. Women get lower wages because for housework they get no wage: there are always women at home desperate for a wage, however low. Women get lower wages because housework saps their time and energy to fight for higher wages. Women get lower wages because the men they work with think of them as their husbands do, as dependent, incapable, ignorant - "housewives".

Some people say that women's work in the home is not productive and therefore they should not get a wage. We believe that women's work in the home is productive in the Marxist sense. Some of us are doing work to show that this is the case. But our perspective of wages for housework, as we have tried to show, doesn't depend on whether or not women create surplus value. We repeat: we are not looking for a productivity deal - so much wages for so much surplus value. Our struggle is based on our need for money, on our need for power, on our need to undermine the power of men over us, to undermine the power of capital over us, and over men and children.

The Power of Women Collective
20 September, 1973

THE POLITICS OF EQUAL PAY

NOTES

1. THE EQUAL PAY ACT.

- a. Limitations of the act : it only applies to a small percentage of the work force:
 "The purpose of the Equal Pay Act is to eliminate discrimination between men and women in regard to pay and other terms and conditions of employment. This it does by establishing the right of women to equal treatment when they are employed on work of the same or broadly similar nature as that of men".

Office of Manpower Economics Report on Equal Pay 1972)

- b. Campaign has been sporadic and divided by nature of the act; which allows for every kind of loop-hole. It has been divisive in the way in which it has been used under the Incomes Policy i.e. women getting increases under Phase 2 at the expense of general (male) salary increase.
- c. Works out in practice as "being equal to the lowest male rate".

2. WHO HAS EQUAL PAY?

- a. At present same basic wage is achieved in sections where women and men working together doing job evaluated as the same (but see (c) above)
- b. Most professions and the Civil Service
- c. N.B. This still does not mean that the average wage in professions is the same. Promotion training etc. are frequently not given to women. Thus even in teaching males on average are on higher (proportionally) scales of pay.
- d. The majority of women work in "women only" spheres - traditionally low paid, even where males are present in the labour force.
 (nursing, catering, distributive trades, office jobs, domestic service, etc.)

3. THE MAJORITY OF WOMEN DON'T GET EQUAL PAY.

- a. Crucial Point:
 "womens' average weekly earning only varied between 55 and 49 per cent of those of men from 1950 to 1970".
Report 1972)
- b. This will not be substantially changed by the Equal Pay Act as this will only affect a section of women workers.

4. WHAT IS THE BASIS OF THE VAST DIFFERENTIAL BETWEEN MALE/FEMALE WAGES?

- a. Division of Labour within home and society
 (i) jobs undertaken by females in public production are mainly service or secondary to men.
 (ii) responsibility in the home is mainly that of women.
 (iii) divisions within the home are recreated outside to women's economic disadvantage.

- b. The existence of the family as an economic unit under capitalism.
- (i) transference of property
 - (ii) family as consumption unit
 - (iii) financial dependence of children and woman on man
 - (iv) reproduction of (economic) relations of capitalism.

(N.B. Definition of "Economic Unit" needs much more thought and work; Engels is not very clear on this).

5. WHY DOES THIS DIVISION EXIST AND CONTINUE?

- a. Women re-entered social production (as separate from private domestic production) in the Nineteenth Century, from a basis where the division of labour between male and female had become entrenched. Women had moved from a position in the early days of society where their economic activity had been crucial to the survival of the community - to private producers for the individual man - thus economically and socially subservient.

- b. Women in accordance with the labour theory of value entered the labour market as "free" individuals; with nothing to sell but their labour. Entering separately from their husband and children (in general).

BUT

The network of historical circumstances and the ideology, meant that the ACTUAL wages were (and still are) determined by women's general social role - secondary to men - their primary ascribed function that of home and family.

- c. (N.B. Marx excludes two factors from his analysis of changes in the magnitude of the price of labour - the most important one for us being:
- "The employment of these different sorts of labour power (women and children) an employment which is, in its turn made necessary by the mode of production makes a great difference in the cost of maintaining the family of the labourer and in the value of the labour power of the adult male".

('Capital', Vol. 1, p.519)

These are additional factors to the analysis; not points that would alter the logic of the analysis.

- d. THUS each worker enters the labour market as separate individuals but the social structures and ideological super-structure of the society determine the double economic exploitation of women and the young.
- This does not mean we condemn women entering into social production, and need to look for solutions elsewhere (e.g. Wages for Housework)

Marx: "Modern industry, by assigning as it does an important part in the process of production, outside the domestic sphere to women, to young persons, and to children of both sexes, creates the new economic foundation for a higher form of family and of the relations between the sexes... It is obvious that the fact of the collective working group being composed of individuals of both the sexes and all ages, must necessarily under suitable conditions, become a source of humane development."

('Capital', Vol. 1, p.395)

6. EQUAL PAY FOR WORK OF EQUAL VALUE: REVOLUTIONARY IN CONTENT

a. BECAUSE

- (i) whilst the extraction of surplus value is the purpose of productive labour
- (ii) the existence of the family as an economic unit of society.

There can be no complete destruction of the vast differential between male and female wages or the division of roles within society.

b. PRESENTATION OF DEMAND CRUCIAL

- (i) attacks roots of capitalist production, when demand is raised not only in specific sections; but as a minimum basic wage for women.
- (ii) when it is clearly linked with its roots, i.e. the totality of women's oppression under capitalism.
- (iii) equality of pay and job opportunity is a crucial factor in ending oppression within the home, i.e. establishing economic independence of women from the individual male.
(see Engels, The Origin of the Family, p.137)
- (iv) centrality of presenting campaign in terms of struggle against sexist and capitalist practice and ideology.

7. SOCIALISM AND EQUAL PAY

a. SOCIALISM : the economic basis of socialism is the socialisation of the means of production.

b. The means of production are not socialised until there is: full participation of the working population (women and men)

c. THUS the economic basis for the liberation of women has not been fully laid until (see Engels p.138)

- (i) full educational and training facilities for women
- (ii) extensive child care facilities, run by men and women. with the socialisation of children as the responsibility of the community.
- (iii) socialised housework (where feasible). with residual housework shared equally by men and women.
- (iv) vigorous campaigning against all obstacles, ideological and practical preventing or limiting women's full participation in production and society.

8. SOCIALIST COUNTRIES AND EQUAL PAY

a. In socialist countries (Soviet Union, China, etc.) average wage differentials still exist; as do role differences in the society.

b. e.g. Soviet Union: Doctors and teachers, are largely composed of women; but they are non-prestigious jobs, and low paid.
e.g. China: women receive in rural districts less work points per day, as their day is shorter due to their household duties.

c. Causes: due to complex political and economical reasons but also because the implementation of the points (3. a-d) has been partial

d. Socialism lays the potential basis of women's liberation but our struggle and understanding will determine the full realisation of that potential.

9. TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

- a. Equal Pay complex: not a straightforward economic demand but a demand that raised fundamentals of revolutionary change.
- b. Central issue to women's independence (autonomy) from individual male.
- c. Liberation, economic autonomy, collective responsibility cannot develop in a society that is based on exploitation (extraction of s.v.)
- e. Our presentation of issue, is crucial.

10. NECESSARY RESEARCH

- a. Detailed knowledge of economic and social position of women in all socialist countries.
- b. Greater knowledge of socialist economics. Particularly how wages are determined; and household economics (e.g. rent)
- c. Statistics of child care provisions; and how household responsibilities are undertaken.
- d. Is the family a major economic unit of society? Developing methods and research to assess this and what changes have occurred.
- e. RECOGNITION that different conditions in different countries will not be the same as ours; our struggles will be different, but crucial to learn from those of others.

Judith Hunt

FERTILITY: ECONOMICS AND IDEOLOGY

These notes were put together by three of us who were first of all struck by the deceptive similarity between the demands put forward by the Women's Movement for control of our fertility and those of the Population Control Lobby which is currently campaigning for many of the same provisions but from a very different standpoint. We spent a lot of time looking at the neo-Malthusian arguments and birth control policies (some of them blatant guinea-pig experiments) which have been applied in the developing countries by international agencies for the last 15 years and whose dual function seems to have been to provide an alternative explanation for the lack of independent development in those countries and to still the spectre of decreased consumption in the advanced capitalist countries or social unrest with radical consequences in the developing countries themselves. The experience of countries that have fought for self determination does show that a population policy may have a place in development but this may or may not confer greater freedom on women. These notes, however, are an attempt to situate our own analysis i.e. to try and look at the questions we should be asking as women in an advanced capitalist society, and to draw attention to what we see as a real possibility - the introduction of a population limitation policy here - which would obviously affect in a variety of ways our situation, our analysis and our tactics.

Lastly, and particularly because none of us are economists, this paper is much more of an attempt to draw together different strands and pose questions than give answers or elaborate an analysis.

Why is the population debate a matter of concern (a) for Women's Liberation; (b) for the Left in general? Women and Third World peoples are currently demanding the right to self-determination. The population control lobby, (which we believe to be basically funded and promoted by business interests in the developed world, see A.1. below) would appear to have as its basic aim control - control of women, control of Third World peoples - and operates with a neo-Malthusian analysis which attributes poverty, underdevelopment, shortage of social services, food, resources, etc. to excess population.

When women demand the right to control their own fertility, they find that they are supported by the population control lobby in their demands for contraception and abortion, but are accused of being selfish and irresponsible if they demand the right to have children as well as the right not to have children.

Third World nations are also told that they 'have a responsibility' to assess whether population increase is hindering their economic development - told this by the very countries which are currently extracting and despoiling the natural resources of the Third World.

Third World women living within the developed countries are doubly threatened. Enoch Powell accuses immigrants in Britain of 'breeding too fast'. Black women in the United States have been subjected to intense pressures to stop having children and have even at times been forcibly sterilised (see recent class-action suit against the State of Alabama for the sterilisation of 12 and 13 year old black girls). Again the accusation is that, being poor, and of low IQ, it is irresponsible of them to have children.

Responsibility in a socialist society which is controlled by everyone, including women on an equal basis, may take on quite a different meaning from what the population lobby means by responsibility. The demand to control our own fertility may perhaps be seen as an intermediate demand, but nevertheless a crucially necessary one.

These notes are divided into 3 sections:

A. The Population Control Lobby.

B. Our current birth control provision in Britain and what the movement has done in this field.

C. Thoughts on a Marxist/Feminist approach to population.

A. THE POPULATION CONTROL LOBBY

1. Notes on the financing of international birth control agencies

The main umbrella body for international agencies concerned with the 'World problem of overpopulation' now appears to be the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) founded in 1967 "in response to growing international concern about the world population situation, especially in developing countries where population is the key factor affecting development efforts." But the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), Population Council and Ford Foundation have all been working in the field for much longer (IPPF was set up by Britain, Holland, U.S.A., Sweden and India in the early 1950s). UNFPA gets 40% of its budget from the U.S. and other high-ranking contributors are Canada, U.K., Germany, Netherlands and Sweden; its policy committee includes: the Population Council (John D. Rockefeller III who initiated the World Leaders' Declaration on Population), Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation (John Ds brother), Pathfinder Fund and other unidentified. UNFPA works closely with the World Bank, U.S. and Canadian AID and other similar organisations.

Technique: to convince 'influentials' in each country to promote policy of population control; to channel funds into countries whose governments are not yet willing through programmes arranged by non-governmental organisations especially IPPF; to organise and finance programmes of research into medical and sociological aspects of birth control; to run birth control programmes with the help of WHO, UNICEF, Oxfam, etc.; heaviest emphasis seems to be on selling a belief in the 'population crisis' as main cause of failure of UN 'development decade', and any and all social problems.

UNFPA claims concern for infertility as well as birth control, but spent only \$15 thousand so far for infertility research, out of latest \$100 million budget.

Recent hard-sell population campaigns in industrialised nations (Zero Population growth in the U.S., Population Stabilisation in Britain) may be due to political counter-attacks from poor countries. 1973 UNFPA report expresses the hope that population programmes in industrialised countries will "facilitate the dialogue between them (the industrialised countries) and the poor world where the largest concentrations of population exist and take some of the edge off divisive arguments."

Open question: does anyone know where ZPG and Pop. Stab. get their money?

2. Recent history of attitudes to population policy in Britain

The Population Control Lobby in Great Britain has developed over the last 6 years with an acceleration in the last two. We are now faced with a situation in which the demands for birth control facilities and abortion made by the Women's Movement a few years ago and treated with irony or hostility are being taken up by this lobby. It is important to note that it consists of a combination of bodies like FPA which have provided and campaigned for the birth control facilities we have, and have now taken up the question of population control, and new bodies, in particular Population Stabilisation (see later) which was set up in 1972 specifically for this purpose. However, Linda Starke who founded Population Stabilisation is also working in the general publicity department of the main London office of the FPA.

Past attitudes to a population policy for Britain have differed widely, but until very recently the predominant concern has been with quality rather than quantity.

1944 Royal Commission on Population set up to study the implications of the fertility rates which had led to decline in the population over the previous 20 years and which had prompted fears of 'national extinction'. A great deal of evidence was submitted purporting to prove that intelligence was negatively correlated with family size and that 'later marriages of intelligent people, their restraint in producing fewer children and the inheritance of their intelligence by their offspring' was leading to a deterioration of the average intelligence of the population. It was feared that equal pay for women would further encourage educated women to have fewer children and suggested that substantial child allowances would substitute for loss of income and persuade more 'intelligent women to become mothers'.

The economics committee of the Commission was also worried about 'stock'. They recommended strongly pro-natalist measures and gave as their prime reason the fact that 'a sub-replacement birth-rate would encourage immigration and so reduce the proportion of home-bred stock in the population'.

1965 Still concern about shortage of labour. The Labour Party's National Economic Plan forecast that by 1970 the country would require 200,000 additional workers.

The latest wave of interest in the population question in this country and this time the weight of opinion is clearly on the side of anti-natalist forces, seems to date from 1967.

1967 Exchange of letters between Sir David Renton, Conservative M.P. for Huntingdon and Harold Wilson appeared in New Horizon. Renton was specifically concerned about:

- i. increasing use of farmland for building
- ii. balance of payments problems exacerbated by food imports
- iii. lack of rising investment due to resources directed to schools, housing, etc. for growing population.

He thought that any manpower shortages consequent on a stationary population could be compensated for by improved techniques of automation. He argues strongly for government support in discouraging births in large families and drew attention to the 'advantages to be gained from limiting immigration - particularly from the Commonwealth countries with massive population problems of their own.'

Wilson not impressed:

- i. defended classical economic concepts - more people necessary to produce more goods; therefore bigger markets, etc.
- ii. claimed that Britain would still be able to feed an expanding population in 2000 by extra foreign exchange earned in increasing exports.
- iii. stressed personal choice element and didn't think the government could be involved, or indeed be successful, in changing the attitudes of the majority of parents.

1968 Alternative view from the Labour Party. Douglas Houghton said that in his opinion large families were a sign of social irresponsibility and would soon come to be considered as a form of social delinquency.

- 1968 'Environment' organisations get involved. Conservation Society published 'Britain's Population Problem'.
- 1968 Edwin Brooks M.P. wrote an article entitled 'Does Britain need a Population Policy?' in Advances in Fertility Control, a magazine published by Excerpta Medica with a grant from Syntex Pharmaceuticals. His answer was in the affirmative.
- In the same edition the magazine announced a prize-winning essay competition on the subject 'Identifying the barriers to the spread of knowledge about family-planning with suggestions for their reduction or elimination'. Prizes were provided by Syntex and were subsequently won by former Pop. Council and Ford Foundation staff and by the medical directors of two of the biggest drug companies producing oral contraceptives, both of whom had been involved in 'pill' trials in developing countries and in Britain.
- 1968 All-party motion in the commons, tabled by Renton, and signed by 322 out of 630 MPs called on the government to establish 'permanent and adequate machinery' to examine the difficulties associated with Britain's rising population.
- 1969 Conservation Society again: "Why Britain needs a Population Policy".
- 1969 Establishment of Inter-departmental Committee of Senior Civil Servants to advise the government on matters of population.
- 1969 Scientific Community joins in. Two meetings held:
- i. sponsored by the Institute of Biology
 - ii. symposium on 'The Optimum Population for Britain' held at the Royal Geographical Society and attended by distinguished agriculturalists, biologists, demographers, economists, sociologists and family planning experts.
- Most of the participants agreed that Britain was over-populated and an optimum population of about 40 million was suggested.
- A group of scientists concerned about the lack of a population policy also submitted a memorandum to the Registrar General.
- 1969 Another article on Britain, "Population Control for Britain; present attitudes and future prospects", appeared in Advances in Fertility Control, this time by Aubrey Manning, reader in Zoology at Edinburgh University.
- 1971 Birth Control Campaign formed to press for better birth control services
- April
- 1971 Ross Panel set up to 'assess the available evidence about the significance of population growth for both public affairs and private life in this country at present and in prospect; to make recommendations about further work required and how it should be conducted; and to report within one year.
- Nov.
- early Population Stabilisation formed as an offshoot of Zero Population Growth
- 1972 which was founded by Paul Ehrlich in the U.S. in 1968.
- 1972 Doctors and Overpopulation set up as a result of a statement by 55 distinguished doctors which appeared in The Lancet and the British Medical Journal.
- Jan.
- 1972 Countdown Campaign set up as an adjunct of the FPA to raise money for population control programmes, both in developing countries and in Britain.
- (?)
- 1973 Ross Panel reported. Some key findings were:
- i. a stationary rather than expanding population would be advantageous.
 - ii. population policy is not a panacea for curing the ills of society.

- iii. only voluntary measures to promote reduction in population growth acceptable.

The panel also noted that 'a movement towards an average family size consistent with a stationary population is likely to be associated with increased demands by married women for employment and other opportunities for social participation outside the immediate family circle'.

1973 Population Day organised by the following organisation:

May	Conservation Society	Friends of the Earth
	Countdown Campaign	Population Stabilisation
	Doctors and Overpopulation	Birth Control Campaign
	Environmental Communicators Organisation	Family Planning Association

'Call-to-Action' approach with main theme that population is the cause of the social ills of this society.

Small turn-out but very good media coverage.

1974 Population Minister appointed. The first birth control advertising on Jan. television during 3-day week.

3. Population Stabilisation Ltd.: an example of the neo-Malthusian approach in a developed country

Analysis: Population dominates the discussion of all social issues - food supplies, housing shortage, etc. Population control seen as the only thing we can do. Without it any other cause is lost (Cf. Ehrlich in the U.S.). (What other cause are they fighting for?) Target boroughs are those with large numbers with low incomes; cost-benefit analysis used to show the savings from preventing 'unwanted', i.e. illegitimate + unplanned births. Population Day leaflets (12th May 1973) blamed population growth for over-crowded schools, high prices of land, traffic jams, etc. Pop. Stab.s latest report on housing blames population and the government and asks the government to provide more housing and to adopt a rational population policy. However, it campaigns on the latter only.

Means adopted and suggested: 1) forming of local branches to recruit support, propagandise, pressure local authorities for comprehensive family planning services. 22 branches so far.; 2) Lobbying of Parliament to get a government population policy. Submitted report to the Ross Panel. It is interesting here that whereas Population Stabilisation originally suggested the withdrawal of family allowances and tax disincentives after the second child, they have now gone back on this and are stressing voluntary measures, i.e. control through propaganda and provision of facilities. This perhaps indicates awareness of the possibility of a backlash (Cf. rejection of birth control by radical blacks in the U.S.) or it may reflect the rejection of such measures by the Ross Panel. Also, the recent figures for Great Britain indicate that we may stabilize our population anyway if current birth rates continue. Population Stabilisation members used the slogan "A woman's right to choose" at the Anti-SFUC demonstration Nov. 1973 but wore buttons saying "stop at two". It is clear also from their literature that they regard the Women's Movement as a potential ally.

B. OUR CURRENT BIRTH CONTROL PROVISION IN BRITAIN AND WHAT THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT HAS DONE

1. Contraception and Abortion facilities in Britain

Legal situation:

- 1) NHS (Family Planning) Act England and Wales (1967) permitted local authorities to provide family planning services: ditto Health Service and Public Health Bill (1968) for Scotland.

- ii) Abortion Act (1967) allows abortions certified in good faith by two registered medical practitioners of the opinion that:
- a) the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman or of injury to the physical or mental health of the woman or any existing children of her family (account may be taken of the woman's actual or reasonably foreseeable environment); or
 - b) there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.

In practice this means, where medical practitioners are amenable there is abortion on demand. However, see below, there is enormous variation from area to area in the problems of getting abortions on and off the NHS. Moreover, the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) wishes to get the law amended so that it would operate more restrictively than it does at present.

iii) March 1973 Sir Keith Joseph announced that family planning advice and services would be available on prescription under the NHS from April 1974 onwards. This meant a retrogressive step for those boroughs which already provide free services. A Lords amendment that family planning services should be free was rejected three times by the Commons.

Provisions

Under the National Family Planning Agency Scheme, out of a total of 232 local health authorities in England, Wales and Scotland, 151 employ the FPA as agents. Of the remaining 81 LHAS, 69 operate a direct service or employ another agent, 6 give a grant to the FPA, 4 are negotiating and only 2 have no family planning service at all. Moreover, 21 operate a direct service in addition to that provided by the FPA. Nevertheless, of much greater importance is the fact that provision varies according to whether it is free, subsidized, and whether it is available to the unmarried and if so, at what age. Moreover, some clinics are open rarely during the week and may not be outside working hours.

Opportunities for getting abortions also vary widely depending on the existence or otherwise of sympathetic doctors within the NHS or the existence of private clinics and the ability of the woman to pay outside.

Examples:

<u>% abortions of live births</u>	<u>on NHS</u>		<u>Non-NHS</u>	
	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1969</u>	<u>1970</u>
<u>London</u>				
Waltham Forest	2.6	2.7	3.3	5.7
Southwark	12.1	18.7	2.8	4.5
Kensington & Chelsea	13.4	20.1	42.0	54.8*
Westminster	16.3	23.4	36.3	45.0*
<u>Newcastle</u>	13.7	18.4	0.5	0.6
<u>Liverpool</u>	3.0	5.0	0.8	2.3

*The apparently higher abortion rate of residents of these two regions probably include women giving accommodation addresses as normal place of residence.

The extremely low level of abortions in Liverpool is assumed to be due to Catholic influence among doctors.

It is not known how many illegal abortions are still performed; doubtless many. It has been suggested that due to fear of pressure to be sterilised at the same time as having an abortion, some working class women prefer to have back-street abortions.

Abortion facilities in Great Britain compared with Western Europe

We have the impression that Britain is the easiest place in Western Europe to obtain an abortion - even including those countries which have liberalised abortion laws, i.e. Denmark, Finland, Norway, Switzerland. The following have no legal abortion at all or only if the mother's life is in danger: Austria, Belgium, France, (nevertheless there is an estimated 1 abortion for every 2 live births!) West Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Holland.

2. WACC - History and National Activities

Following Skegness Women's Liberation Conference in October 1971 groups interested in abortion and contraception decided to start a national campaign.

- 20 Nov. 1971 Series of actions to demonstrate solidarity with women all over the world who were campaigning against restrictive abortion and contraception laws.
- Jan. 1973 London Abortion Action Group held national meeting of interested groups and formed WACC. Policy statement drawn up with three demands -
- i. Free, safe and reliable contraception available to every woman on the NHS;
 - ii. Abortion - a woman's right to choose; any woman who is unwilling to continue her pregnancy should have the undisputed right to a free and safe abortion;
 - iii. No forced sterilisation; pressure should not be put on any woman to accept sterilisation as a condition for abortion.
- 1972 London WACC, with the help of other groups, compiled evidence for the Lane Committee on the workings of the Abortion Act; presented in the form of a pamphlet - Women and Abortion.
- 1972 & '73 Several campaigns against SPUC, including one counter-demonstration of 500 women in Manchester in March 1973.
- Jan. 1973 First national conference held in Liverpool, 117 women came.
- 21 May 1973 Population Day. Sisters from WACC and Women's Liberation Health Action Group distributed leaflets pointing out where our views differ from those of the 'Population Control' lobby.
- June 1973 Visit from Susan La Mont of WONAAC. Meetings held in Glasgow and London.

WACC Newsletters - first four issues were produced by Nottingham WACC and the following three by London and then Bristol.

Other activities so far

Several teach-ins and public meetings have been held and WACC has also sent representatives to meetings in Paris and New York.

Local activities have included - finding sympathetic gynaecologists and G.P.s; setting up Pregnancy Advisory Centres; free pregnancy testing; natural childbirth classes; giving information and handing out leaflets on contraception, e.g. from market stalls; self-examination groups; working with women's cancer prevention campaign; campaigning for - better provisions in V.D. clinics; better treatment of women in childbirth; sex education; free contraception locally.

Future activities

Nottingham WACC, with the help of other groups, is producing an Abortion and Contraception Handbook which will include - questions and answers about abortion;

the Abortion Law; the population question; the Right-to-Life Campaign; the history of abortion and contraception; the right to choose - abortion and contraception in Great Britain; how to build a local campaign; International campaigns for abortion and contraception; the NHS re-organisation scheme.

Campaign against SPUC which is trying to get a private member's bill through Parliament to further restrict the abortion law. Successful counter demonstration at Westminster, November 1973.

Nottingham WACC has suggested the following aims for the future

re. NHS reorganisation:

- i. To campaign with other groups for a totally free service, with no prescription charges.
- ii. Contraception clinics similar to those set up by the FPA in all major housing areas within easy reach of bus routes.
- iii. A large government publicity campaign giving details of contraception clinics, pregnancy testing and referral services...

re. Abortion:

- i. A new law with no restrictions on our right to choose to have an abortion.

C. NOTES TOWARDS A MARXIST/FEMINIST APPROACH TO POPULATION IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Malthus work An Essay on Population, first published just after the French Revolution as an attack on notions of the perfectability of man, argued that there was no way of improving the lot of the masses since any rise in wages would lead to a rise in population and since population could increase much faster than food supply the end result would be a drop in the standard of living. Malthus' work was seen as a justification for a punitive approach to pauperism which was the ultimate expression of a laissez-faire approach to the labour force. 'If he cannot get subsistence from his parents, on whom he has just demand, and if the society does not want his labour, (a man) has no claim of right to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact has no business to be where he is'. Malthus, Essay on the Principle of Population, 1798, p.

1. Marx and Engels' objections to Malthus

a) Marx criticises Malthus in general for trying to develop an 'eternal law of nature'. Marx: 'Every stage of development has its own law of population'. As an alternative to Malthus' ideas Marx formulates a theory of population for bourgeois society: 'The labouring population therefore produces, along with the accumulation of capital produced by it the means by which itself is made relatively superfluous, is turned into a relative surplus population.'

'The folly is now patent of the economic wisdom that preaches to the labourers the accommodation of their number to the requirements of capital. The mechanism of capitalist production and accumulation constantly affects this adjustment. The first word of this adaptation is the creation of a relative surplus population; or industrial reserve army. Its last word is the misery of the constantly extending strata of the active army of labour and the dead weight of pauperism.' from Capital, Vol.1, p.644.

b) Malthus' theory of population saw conflict between pressure of population and the means of subsistence; Marx showed that the conflict is between population and the means of employment in bourgeois society.

- c) Engels attacks the contrast used by Malthus between the geometrical growth of population and the arithmetical growth of food supply by pointing to the fact that science also advances and with it the possibilities for increasing food supply. Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy, 1844 MSS, p.222
- d) Engels also envisaged the possibility of a number of people becoming so great that it would be necessary to regulate the production of human beings but stressed that in a communist society this would be controlled by the people themselves and not imposed on them. Also 'it will be precisely this society, and this society alone, which can carry this out without difficulty'. Letter to Kautsky, 1 Feb. 1881.

Marx and Engels' critique of Malthus was of a particular relevance to the 19th century situation. The concept of relative surplus population is still important in understanding the definition of overpopulation in developed and developing countries (see Appendix on Trinidad). Engels' comment on the potential for increasing food has been shown to be correct though we may now be more aware of its limits. However as Marxists and Feminists we should ask what new concepts may be needed to describe the relation between economy and population in a post-Keynsian welfare state but we should also divide these into two:

- 1) the contradictions for the economy posed by limitations of the population tending to stabilisation;
- 2) Its implications for the position of women. We outline below some questions which it might help to ask, and some information we thought might be helpful.

2. A Response to modern neo-Malthusianism

Modern neo-Malthusianism interprets social problems in terms of excess population but suggests population control through birth control as the solution.

As feminists we should ideally ask:

- a) in what sense is there a population problem?
- b) what is the rationale behind population policies and what happens to the role of women in situations where abortion and contraception facilities are made freely available?
- c) what kinds of problems would be posed for present controlling interests in developed capitalist countries by stabilising the population?
- d) how do a-c relate to our demand for the control of our fertility and for the liberation of women.

We have not attempted to answer these questions here; we merely present some notes that seemed to us relevant and may help discussion,

- a) The population problem in Great Britain: Though there is much dispute about details it seems generally agreed among experts that in the long run the population should be stabilised since certain resources are finite. However, there are important differences in the urgency with which they look at it; their priorities and their analysis of its consequences (positive and negative) for society as a whole (see above A.2 and below C.c). However we wish to stress that any statement about the relation between population and resources assumes certain kinds of consumption patterns, projected growth of the economy, etc.

b) Rationale behind population policies and their effects for women

1. Underdeveloped capitalist countries: See above notes on the financing of international family planning agencies and Appendix on Trinidad below. These societies as a whole are subjected to imperialistic pressure to reduce their population the main functions of which seem to be - i. an alternative explanation for their lack of independent development; ii. to maintain the high food consumption patterns of the developed countries. (It is also important for the Left not to underestimate the deeply grounded chauvinist appeal to the people of the advanced capitalist economies of such pressure, particularly now that food prices are rising very fast.); iii. to prevent social unrest which might lead to demands for a radical restructuring of these societies.

2. Developed capitalist countries: Early 20th century Britain saw demand for better quality manpower following the discovery of the generally low health of recruits for the Boer War (1899). Response - health and education acts and demands that

poor women be educated in mothercraft. Few seemed aware that poverty might create ill health.

The Eugenics Society (also late 19th century early 20th) had a similar concern with quality but its response was to suggest preferential breeding of 'better stock'.

1930s: general concern in Britain, Sweden, Nazi Germany, Austria, Italy - at possibility of underpopulation ('race suicide') - pronatalist policies adopted e.g. fiscal measures encouraging births; contraceptives outlawed in Germany, France, Italy.

The current population control drive appears as a combination of response to resources shortage and idea that only if we limit our population will developing countries agree to limit theirs.

3. Socialist countries:

USSR: 1920s advanced social legislation aimed at liberating women - divorce made free and automatic for either partner, illegitimacy abolished, abortion free. Result: drop in birth rate. Stalin reintroduced traditional legal situation (divorce inaccessible, abortion illegal) to promote growth in labour force needed for industrialisation. 1956 Abortion made available again on request up to 12 weeks. Current Soviet government attitudes to abortion: i. women have right to abortion; ii. government tries to remove incentives to abortion by providing better housing, nursery schools, etc.; iii. general agreement contraception is better. Nevertheless - growing concern over declining birth rate with medals given to women producing many children.

Czechoslovakia: virtually abortion on demand (1970 - 55 abortions per 100 live births) but: 'The majority of specialists and government authorities are of the opinion that it is necessary to make efforts towards reducing the abortion rate both for medical reasons (despite the fact that deaths from abortion were only between 3 and 6 women in over 200,000 abortions) as well as in view of the development of the population. Reductions, however, cannot be achieved by administrative measures (suspension of abortion law or curtailing the reasons for permitting abortions) but only by a series of socio-political measures'.

Rumania: Until 1966 the world's most liberal abortion law - no approval required for abortion, no bureaucratic procedures, maximum waiting period of one week, but more usually performed on the spot; secrecy assured, fee around 50p. Estimated abortion rates: 4 per live birth and women having as many as 20 abortions in the reproductive period. Birth rate had fallen to 14.3 in 1966 (Cf. 16.0 for England and Wales in 1971). September 1966 - law abruptly reversed to take effect from November. Abortion restricted to stringent medical reasons, rape, incest. Women over 45 or with 4 children or more. Concurrently importation of IUDs and pills stopped and divorce made much more difficult both legally and financially. Results: crude birth rate more than doubles in the following year; infant and maternal mortality both rose. Divorces dropped from an average of 36,000 annually between 1960-65 to a total of 48 in 1967 but have subsequently risen to about 8,000 in 1970.

Cuba: 300 public health clinics, all of which supply contraceptives and are staffed by persons trained to insert IUDs (Cuba makes own IUDs and all contraceptives are free). Oral contraceptive not used at first because of safety questions but now being considered. Abortion permitted for medical and social reasons but illegal abortions still common (not sure why). Registered abortions in Havana in 1968, 18,000 compared with 30,000 live births. Birth rate has declined since the revolution despite many ostensibly pro-natalist policies: e.g. free food, rent, medical services, schooling and child care. These policies were not carried out with the aim of influencing fertility and the decline appears as an unintended side effect which is not entirely welcome.

China: 1954 family planning first considered as a result of census figures - led to education programmes and vasectomies. 1957 condoms manufactured. 1958 prior to Great Leap Forward change in policy in order to maximise manpower resources. 1962 after failure of Great Leap Forward to reach target concern about food supplies. Family planning revived. 1966 Cultural Revolution led to greater

freedom for the young - lower marriage rate and higher birth rates. 1968 campaign for family planning started with renewed stringency; young people taught to marry late and have small families. This is having some success though the birth rate is still not as low as it was before the Cultural Revolution.

Conclusions to b.: 1) The way in which advanced capitalist societies have in the past concerned themselves with fertility has been effectively limited to manpower requirements despite eugenic elements in the discussion. However, they now seem to be moving towards a greater concern with limited resources and we should therefore expect the Eugenic aspect to come to the fore, both in the explicit propaganda of pressure groups and in the effective workings of piecemeal measures on contraception and abortion.

2) Socialist countries have also responded to manpower requirements in their population policies but this has been combined with substantial changes in the role of women outside the home (education, job opportunities). Neither the USSR (except briefly) nor China has accepted the separation of sexuality, procreation and the family in the way in which it has been suggested in the Women's Movement i.e. for the freedom of women to control not only their fertility but their sexuality.

c) Problems posed for the economy by achieving a stable population in Great Britain as seen by three reports:

The Royal Commission on Population (1944) concluded that although in the long run a stable population was desirable, the immediate priority was to counteract the decline which it was feared would lead to national extinction. It was also pointed out that the process of decline would be difficult, due to the problem of maintaining full employment without increasing consumption. It was suggested four objectives of policy would be especially important in carrying out the transition: 1) increased mobility of labour; 2) appropriate allocation of industry; 3) stability of investment and the adjustment of saving to any long-term changes in investment; 4) a steady and sufficient export trade.

Population Stabilisation (1973) has concentrated on frightening people into believing that what we have will be destroyed without lower population growth rate and implies that lowering population growth will solve existing social problems. They see unemployment as something population stabilisation would solve and state in their evidence to the Ross Panel that any fluctuations in the demand for labour could be dealt with by temporarily drafting women into the labour force.

The Ross Panel Report (1973) though limiting the space it devotes to these issues envisages considerable social and economic changes needed to accommodate to a stable population and also mentions the greater participation of women in society as a whole as a way of helping reduce the birth rate.

Three images emerge for women in such a situation: 1) women as the most flexible part of the industrial reserve army; 2) women (when not in the labour force and not producing children) reduced to the super-consumer in the 'none is fun' image; 3) women as requiring wider social roles to encourage them to have fewer children.

Questions we would like to ask: Does stabilising the population mean giving up growth as an economic ideal? Can fewer consumers indefinitely be sold more goods? What are the implications of the permanent development of mechanisation in industry and warfare? What are the limitations placed on this by future fuel and resource shortages? What is the impact on manpower needs of the ability of multi-national companies to use alternative cheaper sources of labour? etc. etc.

d) Some suggestions made by the Women's Movement on the subject of the control of our fertility

These can be seen as the demand that sexuality and procreation be separated - so that women can have control of their sexuality as well as their fertility. But Shulamith Firestone advocates the end of conventional childbearing as the corner-

stone of the liberation of women.

1. Shulamith Firestone proposes the control of science and its subsequent use to free women from child-bearing by contraception and artificial reproduction. 'For like atomic energy, fertility control, artificial reproduction and cybernation are in themselves liberating - unless they are improperly used.' The feminist revolution takes place in her scheme after the socialist revolution and leads eventually to the possibility of polymorphous perverse sexuality and 'the elimination of childhood, ageing and death'. S. Firestone, Dialectic of Sex, p.187.

2. Rivolta Femminile attempts to look beyond the demand for abortion at the, what they call, 'colonisation' of women by vaginal sex. 'The abortion granted by society seeks to prolong and artificially reinforce a female eroticism that has paralyzed and destroyed women for 4000 years... (In an ideal civilisation) it would seem clear that contraceptives are for those who want to take advantage of a procreative type of sexuality, and that abortion is not a solution for the free women, but for the woman colonized by the patriarchal system.' Feminine Sexuality and Abortion, Italy, June 1971.

3. IS pamphlet 'Women Fight Back' explores the idea of being sterile unless we chose to be fertile.

These three examples raise a number of questions we thought it important to look at, e.g. how much do we ask of science and what that means in political terms; the relation between analysis of the forms of women's oppression and concrete demands etc.

Other questions we thought we might ask arising from the material we looked at:

1. What is the relationship between demands for self-determination and the context in which we now find ourselves; would find ourselves if the government introduced a population limitation policy?
2. Whether control of our fertility should have a special place in our analysis and strategy?
3. The role of male contraceptives. Whether we should campaign for them?
4. Lastly, on the issue of the relation between ecology, birth control and the Left, it has been suggested by Shulamith Firestone and Steve Weissman among others that the real inability of capitalism to halt growth and with it pollution and wasteful consumption of resources of all kinds may eventually lead ecologists to turn to the Left and to a radical Women's Movement for answers. This suggestion is backed up by the fact that many socialist countries, even with pro-natalist policies, have experienced unintentional fertility decline due to other programmes. This does not imply that socialism intrinsically reduces fertility or that fertility decreases are not possible under capitalism (as the success of ZPG in the US shows) but it does suggest that countries in which governments control the means of production can more easily increase the opportunity structure for women and carry out other social policies which will favour the lowering of the birth rate. However, we know that political power is not just a place in the labour force!

Peri Halpern

Jane Kenrick

Barbara Segal

APPENDIX 1

Nation of Trinidad and Tobago
as an example

Crude birth rate dropped from 38 per thousand in 1960 to 28 thousand in 1970.

May have been part of pre-existing downward trend throughout West Indies. Population Council of Trinidad takes the credit - had Government support since 1963, special assistance from IPPF, US-AID, Pathfinder Fund, "and other sources" since 1968.

Main analysis given by population controllers for problems of the area:
Population growth is a key cause of the strain on the social services and the high rate of unemployment.

Colonial past: extermination of Amerindians, importation of African slave labour, later of East Indian indentured labourers.

"The West Indies is a place where Britain finds it convenient to carry out production of certain agricultural commodities". J.S. Mill

Now, theoretically, Trinidad and Tobago is an independent nation.

Sugar: chief crop and a major export, growing and refining controlled by Tate and Lyle (UK).

Tate and Lyle has already bought into continental beet sugar interests to prepare for EEC.

Tate and Lyle now in process of mechanizing all phases of sugar production in Trinidad, including even cane cutting.

Oil: most valuable resource - extracting and refining controlled by Texaco (USA) capital intensive industry by its nature

Other industry: 1950s policy of "industrialization by invitation", foreign firms given every financial incentive, then brought in highly mechanized technology.

Banks: all foreign owned, means domestic savings contribute to capital outflow.

Trinidad Broadcasting Co. Ltd.: foreign controlled, role of media in shaping consumption patterns.

Result is: export of local production at little profit to the country, high consumption of expensive imported goods

Labour no longer 'needed' in large quantities, except perhaps as maids and porters at the Hilton

Political temper running high, 1970 violent demo against Canadian banks - links to US Black Power.

Suggested alternative analysis for problems of the area:

Strain on social services due to capital drain by foreign interests.

High unemployment due to elimination of labour intensive areas of economy in favour of capital intensive industries to maintain profitability for foreign firms.

By 1970 (preliminary IPPF report) 70% of the people of Trinidad and Tobago had been persuaded to believe that the first analysis was true.

The richer countries can now be seen as helping a small, poor country to cope with its inadequate social services and unemployment problems (not by emigration of course).

APPENDIX 2

Assorted Quotes

President Johnson in Vietnam, 1966

There are 3,000 million people in the world and we are only 200 million; we are outnumbered by 15 to 1. If numbers give strength the US will be swept away and we will be robbed of what we have; we have what they want.

First Chairman of the Chinese delegation at the U.N. Environment Conference

We hold that of all things in the world, people are the most precious.

Professor John Postgate, University of Sussex, 1973

Since overall fertility depends largely on the proportion of females, a rapid transition to a female minority would be the fastest route to reducing population growth.

Robert S. McNamara (formerly US Secy. of Defense, formerly chairman of Ford, now President of World Bank) at Joint Annual Meeting of World Bank Group and International Monetary Fund, Washington, D.C. 1968.

In terms of the gap between rich countries and poor countries, these studies (of India and Mexico) show that more than anything else it is the population explosion which, by holding back the advancement of the poor, is blowing apart the rich and the poor and widening the already dangerous gap between them... We are therefore faced with the question of what action we at the Bank, as a Development Agency, should take to lift this burden from the backs of many of our members. (white man's burden again!)

Report of the U.N. Working Group on Youth and Population

We recognize that most of the factors that affect population dynamics are development factors...in fact the words developed and 'developing' are no longer meaningful. Rather, the only honest way to talk about the world situation in terms of exploiting countries and exploited countries. Exploitation takes many forms: principally it is the refusal of rich countries to allow poor countries to own and use what material resources they possess in their own way. This exploitation is carried out by institutions, independent and governmental, national and international, all over the world.

Countdown Campaign ad., The Guardian, 18 May 1973.

If the population of the countries from which we import food goes on growing at the present rate, there will be less to go round, less to export, and everyone including people in the so-called affluent countries, will suffer. ...Britain is a green and pleasant land to live in. We can help make every land as pleasant in the years to come. (if we give money to Countdown Campaign)

J. Peel, President of FPA, 1967, Med. Gynaec. Sociol. 2/12 (2-4)

There is today a population crisis in Britain, and all levels of society are represented, but the largest families occur in precisely those sections of the community where family limitation would be most desirable.

Malthus, Essay on the Principle of Population, 1798

If he cannot get subsistence from his parents, on whom he has just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, (a man) has no claim of right to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact has no business to be where he is.

Marx - describing the effects of use of Malthusian ideas by English Parliament in its reform of the Poor Laws.

(The English Parliament) views pauperism as poverty which the workers have brought on themselves, and that it therefore should not be regarded as a calamity to be prevented but rather as a crime to be suppressed and punished.

Excerpts from ads. in the New York Times sponsored by Campaign to Check the Population Explosion

The ever-mounting tidal wave of humanity now challenges us to control it, or be

submerged along with all our civilized values.

This is the crime explosion... Youngsters account for almost half the crimes. And a few short years from now, millions more of them will pour into the streets at the present rate of procreation.

A world with mass starvation in underdeveloped countries will be a world of chaos, and a perfect breeding ground for communism... We cannot afford a half dozen Vietnams or even one more... Our own national interest demands that we go all out to help the underdeveloped countries control their population.

A. Guttmacher (prominent US gynaecologist) on testing steriod injections on women in Thailand

We get 16% breakthrough bleeding (us - in women who are possibly already anaemic) and resumption of menses at irregular times after one ceases medication. (us - meaning possibility of temporary or permanent sterility for women who only expected contraception). But after all, when you are treating a vast number of people who have a great need, and you have a paucity of medical personnel, you must help as many as possible.

Barclay, Enright & Reynolds: Population Control in the Third World

Experimentation with new contraceptive methods is carried on exclusively among exploited groups of the population. There is no more graphic illustration of the role of racism, chauvinism and imperialism in the field of population control... An even broader criticism of contraceptive experimentation is that women are always its object. It is often assumed that it is simply coincidental since the more effective modern contraceptive methods have been female ones. However, the history of male dominance in almost all societies leads us to suspect that there are some social reasons for the phenomenon.

Men are almost always the scientists and administrators in charge of contraceptive experimentation and they have always seen female methods as the high priority for research.

Countdown Campaign (again)

...the psychological effect (of closely confined and crowded living) is already manifesting itself in urban violence, industrial disputes and fiercer competition than ever before...the solution is to check the world population explosion.

Population Stabilisation - (discussing labour shortages consequent on a stable population)

...minor fluctuations in the demand for labour can be met by reducing working hours, encouraging more women into the labour force, and similar measures. (us and what happens to women when the labour situation stabilizes again? presumably they go back to look after their 1.8 children)

and

...it is fair to say that most women, and indeed men, quite simply desire and like children, and given that a democratic population policy must reduce the number of children desired, strong influences will have to be brought to bear on people to contain basic desires, which, until recently, have been considered praiseworthy. (Democratic Population Policy?)

Barclay, Enright and Reynolds

We feel that (population control) is a smokescreen which is being used to avoid facing real problems (of misery and injustice). Nothing could be more misleading and ultimately more tragic than to avoid facing the real problems because it is so much easier to work towards less people than less exploitation.

YORK WAY WOMEN'S CENTRE: MAIDEN LANE COMMUNITY SITE,
WHY WE QUIT

article from the Camden Tenant, summer '73.

In a recent article on the Maiden Lane Community Site in the Camden Journal, they mentioned the Women's Centre as one of the local groups using the site. In fact, the Women's Centre has now been forced to close, and many of the other adult groups have also left the site, have not developed as they hoped, or have had to severely curtail their activities. We would like to explain why this has happened.

We in the Women's Centre, along with those in other groups such as the Private Tenants' Association and the Claimants Union, wanted to use the site as a base in the community. We wanted to attract people in, to the community around the site, and be involved in issues, activities, and life in general in the area. We hoped women would use the Women's Centre as a place to get information and advice, discuss common interests and problems, and work to change things that women were concerned about in the locality.

However, as was shown in the Journal's report of the anger of the tenants from the neighbouring Agar Grove Estate, the site in general has not developed in that way at all. Roger Marks, a Free School play leader, clearly shows this when he told the reporter from the Journal that it is the kids from Agar Grove who are the "wild ones" - as if he therefore has no further interest in them nor responsibility for their behaviour on the site. Roger Marks is also reported as saying that he "can't accept that parents have any reason to be afraid to send their kids to play on the site." This is, in our view, hypocritical complacency.

We were certainly scared for our children's safety, and so were many of the women who came to the site at our invitation. In the spring, cars were being driven around recklessly by the kids, and there have also been erratic periods of stone and bottle throwing, broken glass everywhere from windows that were constantly being smashed. The play leaders policy of not "imposing" anything on the few older kids who used the site regularly, and of allowing them complete freedom over the whole area, blocked everyone else's freedom to use the place. Moreover, from what we observed ourselves, and heard from people who did go down to the site to look around, we know that the play leaders (primarily the men) working there did not always try to give people from the area a re-assuring welcome, but quite often, in fact, gave them a rude brush-off.

There is surely something wrong when a council estate such as Agar Grove cannot get a community hall, a zebra crossing on Agar Grove, adequate kids playspace, laundry facilities, let alone proper maintenance, while a so-called "community site", with all its tentativeness and ambiguities, can get a generous budget from the Council with no stipulations for community control over its use. The general running of the site and the spending of the £16,000 grant, are effectively controlled by a group mainly of play leaders, who seem to have different aims. They are not interested in creating a Community Centre that everyone in the area will be able to use to the full, but see the site as an "alternative structure" in which they can work with a small group of kids, all doing their own thing.

The site is seen as an end in itself, itself a new "community". They are really only interested in a handful of kids - in the Free School and a few older ones. They do not see themselves primarily as organising activities for other kids in the area.

We at the Women's Centre are now in the process of starting afresh in the same area. This time - a more accessible and open space, hopefully with other community groups we know and trust.

CAMPAIGNS AND DEMANDSWorkshop I. Report: Politics of Campaigns and Demands in General

Papers/Notes: A Sense of Liberation
 Women and the Wage System
 Fertility: Economics and Ideology

Opening thoughts: We need to separate campaigns and demands to understand the relationship between political action and their theoretical formulation. Below are some thoughts about this.

Demands: The demands of the movement arise out of theoretical analysis and objective conditions - but as Roberta's paper ('A Sense of Liberation') suggests, demands arise out of our analysis of 'old consciousness' but should be formulated by our new consciousness. We should therefore ask whether, for example, the demand for wages for housework is an important development or no more than a reactive demand formulated out of 'old consciousness'. What is the relationship between the analysis of women's oppression and concrete demands? Demands pose problems for the WLM at various levels. Should demands unite all women in the movement behind them and does this simply mean that demands have to be based on a minimum consensus like the four demands we have now which have arisen as a response to particular conditions? Alternatively, should socialist/Marxist women press to formulate demands on a political basis arising out of their analysis? It may be time to ask whether the demands of a broad fronted movement as we have now should be the basis for all campaigns or whether Marxist women should build their own campaigns within the movement....What would be the overall strategy of a women's liberation movement which ranges across many different political positions and levels of feminist consciousness? How do socialist/Marxist women relate to the possible contradictions between women's rights and women's liberation?

Campaigns: Our theoretical analysis has given us the basis for formulating our demands but has not led to a strategy for the movement. But to build campaigns we must analyse our possible strategy taking into account, short and long term, the limitations imposed by capitalism and the objective conditions of this country at any one time, as well as the limitations imposed by the consciousness of women inside the movement (women's rights and women's liberation, socialists, radical feminists etc.) and of women outside the movement; for example, the night cleaners.

There are also the limitations that the demand itself imposes on any campaign - for example, whether it will be offensive or defensive - like the Family Allowance campaign. The strategy of campaigns must involve continual development of our analysis so that tactics can be altered accordingly. Also we must look at the relationship between various campaigns and demands, for example, WACC and the demand for day care provision; these raise problems of priorities, of one cutting the ground from under the other.

The Discussion: We were both frustrated that the workshop did not really deal with the topic as we felt that having reached a certain position thinking things out the week before, we would have welcomed discussion that would have developed some points further. Very few of the points we made in introducing the workshop were taken up. Instead there was a long discussion/argument basically amongst those also committed to other left groups and parties about whether one's primary area of struggle should be in the Women's Movement or outside. However, the discussion did not really deal with the question as it relates to the demands and campaigns of the women's movement. There were some ideas put forward that the campaigns of the movement do not relate to the immediate needs of working class women (prices campaigns were put up as an alternative) but generally people seemed to shy away from going into this in more detail. Many women at the workshop had had no direct experience of campaigns which made discussions rather abstract or else put those active in campaigns in the position of having to describe detailed personal experience as evidence of the campaign's existence.

The problem of priorities for those in other parties and groups gave the impression that 'divided loyalties' were a real issue - but perhaps this is more a response to the confusions within the movement about demands and campaigns than a reality. This also raised the problem of what is reformist and what revolutionary. There seemed to be a feeling amongst some women in other groups that the Women's Liberation Movement's four demands and campaigns are reformist and though they support these demands they feel they can't actively organise round them (like for example IMG, which prefers to campaign round prices).

Delia Dumaresq

2.

Questions we raised in our introduction :

The relationship between the form of women's oppression and the formulation of demands. The four demands attempted to cover the spectrum of women's oppression. Working with the night cleaners raised the problem also of learning about the nitty gritty of women's lives, their backgrounds and the way their oppression as workers and as women directly impinges on their ability to organise themselves. How can we formulate campaigns and demands and organise around them in a way that connects with other facets of women's oppression and be seen to be making the connection obvious? Because of the numbers of women at home it is perhaps possible to try to avoid the separation of home and work endemic, apparently in 'male' struggles. Tactical problems: the difficulties of co-ordinating local campaigns. How can we create a structure that facilitates a national campaign (e.g. around Family Allowances)? This also raises the problem of our relationship to other movements and organisations. How do we invest limited one* issue campaigns with political implications which raise people's consciousness? There is a problem of being unclear ourselves what we are at and of campaigning in a way that acquiesces in people's state of consciousness without raising it. To what extent do we attempt to present a socialist view in such a diverse movement?

Questions and points raised in the discussion

Does the Women's Movement need demands at all? Are demands conceived of as achievable; are they transitional - serve to raise consciousness? Who are demands for? What are we going to do about them? Are they to unite people around what we are saying? Are they propagandist or protest? Demands define the movement; the one couldn't exist without the other. Demands are associated with activity. Who do we make our demands of? You need activity but the problem is that if you just have local activity you have no means of communicating. Things disintegrate. Women's Liberation stresses our experiences, changes our lives - giving people space to survive in capitalist society. You can't measure women's problems in terms of money. Demands start from where people are at. Prices: we should take up issues affecting the working class as a whole but our demands are not necessarily the most appropriate. On the other hand they haven't really ever been effectively campaigned around. Isn't it a problem of the structure of the movement? We can't separate activity and theoretical problems. It's no good talking about doing things if the mechanisms for achieving them don't exist.

Bea Campbell

Workshop 3 Report: The Exploitation of Women as Housewives

Papers/Notes: Women and the Wage System

The Women's Liberation Movement and the present crisis of British
Capitalism: a proposal for action

Wages for Housework: What it is based upon*

The Perspective of Wages for Housework*

As it turned out this was a very popular workshop and given the numbers and the fact that there were three chairwomen the workshop divided into three groups after the papers had been summarised and the chairwomen involved had made suggestions as to the questions which it would be most useful to discuss. These were questions raised in Jean Gardiner's paper as to the strategy of the socialist women in the Women's Liberation Movement - and the suggestion contained in Hilary Wainwright's paper that the Women's Liberation Movement organise a Price Campaign through local housewives' committees.

The third group which first went up to the balcony of this hall then decided that it was more feasible to join up with the other two groups in the main hall. The discussion which followed did not take up the points raised in either of the two papers instead the discussion centred around the pros and cons of wages for housework without reaching a firm conclusion either way - for or against. The experience of the workshop was ultimately disappointing - a feeling that there had not been a discussion but a dialogue between given prior positions so that people ended up talking at rather than with each other. And it was this situation which it had been hoped the workshop structure would avoid.

Penny Woolley

*Both these papers arrived too late to be included in the framework and summary prepared by the chairwomen but were very important to the discussion in the workshop.

Workshop 4 Report: The Economics of Equal Pay

Papers/Notes: Notes on Equal Pay: The Politics of Equal Pay

The Workshop around Equal Pay was a wide-ranging one which didn't really go into the argument presented in Judith Hunt's structured notes, although it touched on some of the points raised. The limitations of the Anti-Discrimination Bill as it affected women workers (e.g. no equal pensions, no equal retirement age) were pointed out, as were those of the Equal Pay Act. The implementation of the Act was seen to be in conflict with the Incomes Policy, and necessarily limited by it; similarly the linkage of the Act to the Industrial Relations Court placed an obstacle in the way of its application in practice; whilst the system of dividing job categories to evade the Act was flourishing.

The discussion of the Act led to the question of the concrete significance of the slogan "Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value". The specificity of women's work, in terms of its relation to work in the home, the part-time and unprotected nature of much female labour (often sold to contractors rather than direct to the employer) and the ambivalent aspects of the protective legislation which exists were all recognised. On the question of protective legislation there was general agreement that it should be extended to men rather than abolished for women.

We also had to confront the fact that it was impossible to talk about Equal Pay without relating it to other issues - two examples: the discussion of the specificity of women's work led us into a discussion of the family, the family wage and the division of labour, whilst the problem of craft apprenticeships directed the discussion towards sexism in the educational system. Other related problems raised here were that of overtime, and the impossibility of getting a living wage without working overtime, so that reductions in the working day would not necessarily lead to more job opportunity for women, or more equality in the home, and of heightening political consciousness of women's oppression within the factory struggle.

Then came the problem of what Equal Pay meant to us, and the question of what had happened to the Equal Pay Campaign. Several suggestions were made - that groups could get detailed information on women's wages within their town or area and publicize it, that we should pay more attention to the TUC Women's Conference and to building women's caucuses within unions. We generally wanted there to be a specific conference on women in industry and women's work, and agreed that we would propose it at the Plenary Session.

We hoped that the Conference would not be narrowly confined to the wages question but would also take into account the importance of struggles over working conditions.

Ros Delmar

SEXUAL POLITICS AND THE AUTONOMY OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

This short leaflet suggests some points for discussion in an Autonomy workshop on Sunday. The full paper we wrote is too long for quick reading and wasn't ready for distribution before the conference, but it is available here. It is called THE POLITICS OF SEXUALITY IN CAPITALISM and is a collectively written pamphlet (costing 10p. sorry).

The main question we ask is how the women's liberation analyses of the family's role in capitalism can be translated into a concrete practice of sexual politics; and if this happens, what it means for the way we have understood the autonomy of the movement.

The nuclear family is the form which pervades all classes, and has become more and more restricted to two essential roles: as a unit for individual consumption, correlative to individual wage labour and commodity production; and secondly, since the most important centre for the reproduction of labour power has shifted outside the family to education, as a unit for biological reproduction and the regulation of sexuality (within the emotional form of love, to make sure it's monogamous).

The necessity for a sexual politics, as a specific part of a politics of the family is clear: the family is reproduced through the medium of feelings as well as through patterns of individual consumption. The family is continually reproduced on the social basis that puts the family in its particular relation to production under capitalism; but the way this is consciously experienced by people is through their apparently autonomous feelings of love and sexual attraction for each other. The feelings seem unrelated to any social basis, because of the particular way capitalism dissociates the family and all other personal relations, from all other aspects of society.

Every form of social relations generates specific types of feeling. A politics of sexuality is a hard thing to begin because we are within the feelings we want to change; we are also within the ideology surrounding our feelings, such as the sacrosanct, almost moral, value put on romantic love (what Engels calls 'individual sex love') It is only by trying to change the relationships within which we feel that we can gradually come to understand the relationships and feelings we are in now, and have any concrete knowledge and politics of the family, instead of just slogans and abstract "theory".

Women's liberation began this process by challenging the distinction which the left groups still make in theory and in practice, between political and personal, public and private. In consciousness raising, we learned that our personal problems as women have a social basis, and this opened up the possibility of change. Consciousness raising was also supposed to be an intervention in our lives, to help us resist domination by men, and concretely change our relations with women and men.

But the knowledge we gained has not been made collective. We (i.e. the writers of this) can see, at this instance from the start of Women's Liberation, that many women have changed the basis of their sexual lives - mixed and women's communes, women coming out as gay, women choosing to live alone, or with their children but no man, or women who have found themselves unwillingly on their own because of more and more problems with men. But these changes haven't been discussed, learnt from, explained, as part of the movement's political activity, except in ones and twos and small

groups, so we haven't built up a theory and practice of sexual politics. In this area the movement has remained opaque to itself, each of us kept private. We don't feel that we really have much idea of what other women are doing anyway.

Women who have been trying to work things out sexually and emotionally with men have been particularly private, so that whatever struggles have been carried on are separate from the activities of the movement, perhaps through fear of conflict with the ways we have wanted the movement to be autonomous. But once there is a concrete sexual politics we would have to think more about this. For it would mean either making some place in our ideas for explicitly engaging with men in a sexual political practice, instead of just private personal relationships, which might have organisational implications; or making a definite division that there can't be sexual politics with men, only against them.

This is just one of the political and theoretical issues on which discussions about autonomy should be based, or autonomy could become a formal and empty organisation problematic. As members of an autonomous women's movement we all engage in many different types and levels of struggle against sexism: from control over our bodies, to political questions of women at work. A politics of emotional and sexual relationships does not question the autonomy of the movement. The problem, both in theory and practice, is how to relate this struggle to the others.

Perhaps we could begin by discussing some of the following questions:

- How do we think we can change the family and how far can we go under capitalism?
- What are we trying to do in our emotional relationships and how does this relate to the struggle against the family?
- How is the couple, monogamy, individual sex-love, oppressive to women?
- How do our struggles against the family link with our other political work?

Barbara Miller
(272-8751)

Miriam Glucksmann
(836-5615)

Sue Vickery
(226-1681)

We have given our phone numbers and hope that if you want to discuss our longer pamphlet with us, either individually or as groups, you'll get in touch with us.

THE MISSING LINK
(The Theoretical basis for Autonomy)

Some Preliminary Notes

In some ways this piece takes off backwards from the point where A.L.'s (Birmingham W.L.) paper for the last Birmingham (March 1973) conference begins. (The paper was called Strategy and the Women's Movement - first thoughts) She assumes (and I agree) the necessity for a diverse, autonomous women's movement, without going into the reasons behind that assumption. Autonomy is here defined as a movement with co-existing ideologies, independent of any control by or from male-dominated (structurally and politically) left groups. Many of the strategic questions which A.L. raises seem to me to follow on from my conclusions too; because of that (and time and space) I'm not repeating them, but would refer people back to the paper if it is still available.

I am very conscious of writing this on the basis of relatively limited theoretical work. I hope I'm not simply repeating arguments that have been made before; and that some of the questions raised will make sense, even if the suggested answers aren't fully or clearly worked out. Many of the quotations I've used are fast becoming part of the theoretical currency of the movement; my intention in repeating them again is to try and draw a number of strands together, and hope that what emerges will throw some theoretical light on the basis of women's oppression and exploitation, and indicate the theoretical and structural necessity for an autonomous mass women's movement.

Autonomy so far

The fact that we are part of a growing, diverse, international women's movement is both extremely exciting and problematical. The assumption that we 'come together around our specific oppression as women' underlies our present unity as a movement. All of us broadly agree that women are discriminated against and exploited outside the home, and that we are exploited and oppressed in a specific way within the home - whatever our race or class. We broadly agree that we must work out ways to attack the two poles of sexism - male chauvinism, the assumption taught to men that they have superior abilities, whatever their social position; and our own internalised view of ourselves as lesser, specially restricted people.

But as the women's movement grows, and action, experience and theory develop, that assumption of all-encompassing 'sisterhood' (politically definable as 'autonomy') is coming under closer examination. It is no longer enough to say we organise together because we organise together. If we are to be politically effective in struggling for the liberation of women, then we must try and develop an analysis which shows why it is necessary to have a diverse and independent women's movement, and which defines the areas of political power which that movement can represent.

Most of the writing produced in the movement is moving towards analyses of this kind. But so far there hasn't been much which links the analysis to the political role of the movement. Certain analytical developments imply specific political roles, and this comes from the theoretical bases assumed. There seem so far to be two extremes which may be useful as a point of departure (I'm aware that most women may well fluctuate between aspects of the two, but the extreme possibilities define the fact that the

different analyses are ultimately mutually exclusive and irreconcilable).

Put crudely, the two extremes are: (1) Biological determinism (radical feminist theory), which posits the primary and only politically significant contradiction as that between men and women, based on their differentiated reproductive (biological) function; and (2) Economic determinism (expressed by some women with political histories on the left), which posits the primary and only politically significant contradiction as that between labour and capital and places most stress on a purely 'economic' attack. Both views thus have different definitions of what an 'autonomous' women's movement can or can't achieve.

Biological Determinism

The basis of this is that women are united on the basis of their reproductive role and that this union is more important than class or race differences, as it predated and was the cause of their development. Shulamith Firestone in *THE DIALECTIC OF SEX* says:

...biology itself - procreation - is at the origin of the dualism...The biological family is an inherently unequal power distribution.

And because women were therefore the original oppressed group, the only answer is a 'feminist revolution', because 'only women can be revolutionary' (*THOUGHTS ON FEMINISM*, Radical Feminists, London 1972). This view was expressed also by one woman in one of the workshops at Birmingham in March, who said in response to a question about class: 'Women are the class' (i.e. the most oppressed and therefore the most significant section of the working class).

This is presented for tactical solution by Shulamith Firestone as follows:

So that just as to assure elimination of economic classes requires the revolt of the underclass (the proletariat) and, in a temporary dictatorship, their seizure of the means of production, so to assure the elimination of sexual classes requires the revolt of the underclass (women) and the seizure of control of reproduction: not only the full restoration to women of ownership of their own bodies, but also their 'temporary' seizure of control of human fertility - the new population biology as well as all the social institutions of childbearing and childrearing. (Her emphases)

While there are parts of the second half of that quotation which are valid political statements for the women's movement, the first part (and bits of the rest of the book) make the pivotal mistake that seizure of control of reproduction (even if that were possible - see later) would lead automatically to working class control of the means of production. By thus theoretically and tactically concentrating only on the problems of women's biological role, she is not only presenting a totally ahistorical analysis of social development, but indicating a constricting separatism for feminists, rather than a constructive autonomy.

However, when this partial understanding of 'biology itself' spills over into considering women to be 'the class', we are very close to the formulation that a mass women's movement will be the

revolutionary party; which may be an attractive idea (women are half the human race, we're everywhere, all classes and races, we are the leading missing link, etc) but I think is ultimately an over-simplified and idealist conception of the political role of the women's movement.

Economic Determinism

Although this is no longer as crudely expressed as it was some years ago in the movement, it still seems to come from women who may be active in the women's movement, but whose primary political loyalty is to one or other of the male-dominated left groups. Crudely it has always been expressed on demonstrations in the slogan 'Class war not sex war', and rather sophisticatedly recently in Lleonora Lloyd's comments in the July-August 1973 issue of Socialist Woman:

It is increasingly realised that the Women's liberation movement cannot take on really mass proportions without joining the working class struggle and that the struggle for women's liberation has to be carried on within the framework of the political activity of the proletariat...

It (the Women's Liberation Movement) cannot be seen as 'autonomous' from the revolutionary struggle against capitalism but rather must be seen as integral to it. This requires both a struggle against the spontaneist 'new' politics of radical feminism in the Women's Liberation Movement and a struggle for a consistent position on women's oppression in the revolutionary organisations.

The political role for women here defined is that of women's caucuses or groups contained within the revolutionary organisations. Although both Lleonora Lloyd and Kath Ennis in WOMEN FIGHT BACK acknowledge sexism, by reference to the two jobs that women do (inside and outside the home) and their political and ideological subordination, for each the answer is "Yes, women are exploited and oppressed in ways distinct from men in the working class; the answer is to join IS or IMG as the case may be"). For them an independent women's movement has no significant political potential in itself. (There is also a rather more ambivalent attitude to autonomy expressed in H.W.'s paper for the Birmingham conference on Strategy for Revolutionary Socialists within the Women's Liberation Movement, which seems to suggest a kind of dual membership for women, both of the women's movement and of a (any?) left group - it would be useful to have a fuller exposition of how she sees the reality of that dual membership.)

Section 11: The Principles

It is ironic that both the extreme approaches which I've schematically outlined above claim to be basing their analyses and tactics on the principles of Marxist analysis - historical materialism. Since both approaches seem quite clearly partial, and ultimately not far-reaching enough, something must have gone wrong somewhere. It may seem as though there is a call for a compromise between the two - between biological determinism and economic determinism.

What I would like to try and outline is not a compromise, but rather an attempt to draw together some of the strands in both arguments, claiming also to be basing the attempt on the principles of historical materialism, as I so far understand it. Perhaps

the most useful way to organise the argument for the purposes of later discussion is to structure it round questions - which will probably be familiar to everyone, but which I think need to be repeated as they are fundamental to us:

1. How can we use the principles of historical materialism to analyse all aspects of women's oppression and exploitation?
2. What are the theoretical connections between what we term 'economic' production and biological 'reproduction'?
3. If there is, as radical feminists claim, a 'contradiction between men and women', what precisely is the nature of that contradiction?
4. How do the answers to the above questions relate back to the problems of an autonomous women's movement - i.e. why, again, do we organise as women (across class and race barriers) and what is it possible to achieve by so doing?

Throughout the paper I have concentrated on trying to expand an analysis of the economic basis for the oppression of women - the economic and material basis of sexism. Because of time and space I have been unable even to begin dealing in depth with the question of ideology, and this may appear to weight the paper on the side of a straight economic analytic approach. That is not my interest. All too often discussions of ideology are inadequately linked to a clear understanding of its material basis. If the paper were to be further developed, the ideology of sexism would be the next issue, followed by a discussion of the political implications drawn from the conclusions.

Essential principles

According to the materialist conception, the determining factor in history is, in the last resort, the production and reproduction of immediate life. But this itself is of a twofold character. On the one hand the production of the means of subsistence, of food, of clothing, of shelter and the tools requisite therefore; on the other, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species.

(Engels, Preface to Origins of the Family)

The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders is dependent on what is produced, how it is produced and how the products are exchanged.

(Engels, Socialism Utopian and Scientific)

...the term 'historical materialism' to designate that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the mode of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes and in the struggle of these classes against one another.

(Engels, Socialism Utopian and Scientific)

The underlined phrases were chosen because they encapsulate the principle of historical materialism and seem to me to provide the basis of an analysis of all the processes of historical change, at all levels and areas of human life - material, economic, ideol-

ogical, psychological, sexual. The ability to apply the principles depends on how we understand key terms such as production, reproduction, social structure, important historic events, basis, ultimate cause, and, in the light of all this, the nature of the class struggles mentioned at the end of the third quotation. While these quotations might imply a 'crude' correlation between base and superstructure, any task of definition (or redefinition) must take into account the mediations and contradictions between the two.

1. Production and Reproduction

It is indicated above that there is some relationship between the two processes: as Ellen Malos pointed out in her paper for the Birmingham conference, The Significance of Mariarosa Dalla Costa's WOMEN AND THE SUBVERSION OF THE COMMUNITY:

...it is clear that, for Marx, production and reproduction are not separate but interconnected as part of the same process...

and she quoted from CAPITAL

Whatever the process in a society it must be a continuous process... Society can no more cease to produce than it can cease to consume. When viewed therefore as a connected whole, and as flowing on with incessant renewal, every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction. The conditions of production are also those of reproduction...

(My underlining)

2. Production, Labour and Nature

We need to ask also what exactly is the process involved in the material (physiological) production and reproduction of human life:

Labour is the source of all wealth, the political economists assert. And it really is the source - next to nature, which supplies it with the material that it converts into wealth. But it is even infinitely more than this. It is the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labour created man himself.

(Engels, The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man)

and being more specific about the evolution of man through this 'basic' process of 'labour', he points to (!) the change that came about when the species began walking upright in order to free the hand, which could

thenceforth attain ever greater dexterity; the greater flexibility thus acquired was inherited and increased from generation to generation.

Thus the hand is not only the organ of labour, it is also the product of labour. Labour, adaptations to new operations, the inheritance of muscles, ligaments, and, over longer periods of time, bones that had undergone special development and the ever-renewed employment of this inherited finesse in new, more and more complicated operations.

Human 'labour' thus both is part of 'nature' - an activity undertaken by a natural species (human beings)-and is in turn applied to other parts of nature. The significant consequence for human beings of the evolution to walking upright is expressed again by Engels in his introduction to the DIALECTICS OF NATURE:

The specialisation of the hand - this implies the tool, and the tool implies specifically human activity, the transforming reaction of man on nature, production.

What is raised here is not a discussion of historical development as it applies to human beings alone, in a vacuum, but a discussion of the historical relationship of the human species to the rest of 'nature'. The human being is 'that vertebrate animal in which nature attains consciousness of itself'; and this consciousness expresses itself through the fact that the human species alone is capable of consciously making history as a result of

the material foundation of all their other activities, namely the production of their means of subsistence, that is, today, social production.

(Engels, Introduction to the Dialectics of Nature)

Which brings us back to the principles of historical materialism outlined earlier; what distinguishes the human species from other animal species is the ability to make their own history through the production of their means of subsistence, through their ability to develop control over other parts of their 'natural' environment; and thus to develop increasing control over the capacity and quality of 'survival' - human social life.

3. The Division of Labour and the Question of Contradiction

In THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY Part 1, Marx and Engels describe the consequences of the development of the consciousness and control outlined above:

With these there develops the division of labour, which was originally nothing but the division of labour in the sexual act, then that division of labour which develops 'spontaneously' or 'naturally' by virtue of natural predisposition (e.g. physical strength), needs, accidents, etc. Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears.

(My underlining)

He continues:

...the division of labour implies the possibility, nay the fact that intellectual and material activity - enjoyment and labour, production and consumption - devolve on different individuals, and that the only possibility of their not coming into contradiction lies in the negation in its turn of the division of labour.

and adds:

Division of labour and private property are, moreover, identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of the activity.

The combination of these three quotations might seem to indicate a straight line from the division of labour in the sexual act to

the division of labour in a capitalist society. And if the two kinds of division of labour are seen as basically the same (the second stemming from the first), then the solution might appear to be a simple one - "negate" the division of labour itself. But I think it is more complicated than that. The first quotation above suggests that the division of labour in the sexual act, and the division of labour (mental and material) are not the same. The first is defined as "nothing but", and is linked with natural, biological characteristics - strength, etc. (one might also add age, illness, malformation, etc.) So in the first sense 'labour' is used more in the sense that Engels used it as physiological activity as applied to simply physiological functions; whereas the 'truly such' division of labour applies to 'the transforming reaction of man on nature' - production.

It is in this second context of 'division of labour' that the question of 'contradiction' arises; and the term here is also presented as though it had one simple meaning - as has been illustrated by some interpretations of Engels' following statement in THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY....:

The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male.

Here too the term "antagonism" is used interchangeably for both sex and class, and apparently has the same meaning as the word 'contradiction' which is used in THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY. However, this too needs further clarification.

ON CONTRADICTION is an exposition by Mao Tsetung of the "law of the unity of opposites...the basic law of materialist dialectics."

He quotes Lenin:

the law of the unity of opposites is "the recognition (discovery) of the contradictory, mutually exclusive, opposite tendencies in all phenomena and processes of nature"

(his emphases)

and himself says:

The universality of absoluteness of contradictions has a twofold meaning. One is that contradiction exists in the process of development of all things, and the other is that in the process of development of each thing a movement of opposites exists from beginning to end.

The interdependence of contradictory aspects present in all things and the struggle between these aspects determine the life of all things and push their development forward.

However, it is not an abstract exposition of the law of the unity of opposites, but rather one which is applied 'to analysing many aspects of human history and natural history and to changing many aspects of society and nature'.

However, the fact that the contradictory aspects are 'mutually exclusive' implies that there is always the possibility that one aspect will in fact exclude the other. There are, therefore, different kinds of contradictions, which demand different kinds of resolution. In ON THE CORRECT HANDLING OF CONTRADICTIONS AMONG THE PEOPLE Mao Tsetung writes:

We are confronted by two types of social contradictions - those between ourselves and the enemy and those among the people themselves. The two are totally different in their nature...

The contradictions between ourselves and the enemy are antagonistic contradictions. Within the ranks of the people the contradictions among the working people are non-antagonistic, while those between the exploited and exploiting classes have a non-antagonistic aspect in addition to an antagonistic aspect. There have always been contradictions among the people, but their content differs in each period of the revolution and in the period of socialist reconstruction.

The way we understand both the concepts of "division of labour" and "contradiction" as they are applied to "natural" and "social" development will determine the nature of the resolution of the problems that arise. With these distinctions in mind (if they are clear) we can go on to try and analyse the "twofold character" of the "production and reproduction of immediate life" as it specifically affects women.

Economic Production and Biological Production

For the sake of distinction for the moment, I propose using the above terms. This is partly in order to try and begin seeing "production" as part of the same process, partly in order to make a real distinction between different kinds of "labour".

"Biological production" is here taken to mean the limited physiological process which results in the production (birth) of a new physically distinct and historically determined human being: it covers the sexual act between male and female, pregnancy and birth. "Economic production" is taken to cover the production of the means of subsistence for already living human beings. I am aware that this stretches the definition of "production", when applied to the biological process, but the use of this term also indicates the fact that we also have a changing relationship to that process, and never so great a potential as now, with the gradually improving developments in contraception, abortion, medical science which have the possibility of altering parts of the relationship of all adults to the process of biological production (but I'm not indicating necessarily that the logical end of this road need be the "production" of test-tube babies).

Back momentarily to THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY:

The production of life, both of one's own labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relationship. By "social" we understand the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end.

We reproduce ourselves out of ourselves; and in so doing we produce new human beings. The human body is, as it were, both the raw material and the machinery of biological production. If one can mention any universal animal "instinct" that applies also to human beings, it would be the instinct for "survival", though that has to be broken down biologically to have any meaning: the instinct not only means that we have to do certain things to keep ourselves alive - eating, excreting, sleeping etc., but also that we produce new members of the species while other members

of the species reach the end of their life cycle and die. It is obvious also that these processes themselves are biological "facts" and do little more than record a certain kind of simplistic observation of the life process itself. To be meaningful all these processes are historically and culturally defined; at different times and in different places all the above necessary "life" actions are performed, but in many different social situations, and with many different customs and habits.

The purely mechanical process of procreation, however, is distinguished from the other biological processes. Firstly its end function (in terms of the survival of the species) is the production of a new human being, rather than the maintenance of an already "existing" one. Secondly, it consists of the double relationship described in the above quotation: it is "natural" in that one of its most crucial consequences is the species' instinct for survival; it is also immediately and always "social" in the simple sense defined above: it involves the co-operation of two people, male and female. (It is also distinct from the kind of co-operation in manufacture described by Marx in CAPITAL in that it can consist of no less than two people, male and female, and of no more; it is strictly limited co-operation.)

The co-operation is itself twofold: in general it is co-operation for the continuation of the species, in particular it is the co-operation to produce specific human beings - male and female. The physical mechanics are crudely that sperm combines with ovum through sexual intercourse; the ovum remains in the body of the female, the sperm is conveyed from the body of the male to that of the female through sexual intercourse. If and when conception results, the new human being develops spontaneously in the womb of the female. After the requisite period of gestation the new human being is "born" again spontaneously.

The relative biological contributions are fixed: after sexual intercourse the male is then detached biologically from any further contribution to the development of the new human being. The female, on the other hand, remains biologically attached to the process; both conception and gestation take place in the physical limits of her body.

According to Simone de Beauvoir (if she is right) there is nothing in the raw materials themselves which could be seen as either qualitatively or quantitatively distinct:

In the matter of heredity, the laws of Mendel show that the father and mother play equal parts. The chromosomes contain the factors of heredity (genes) and they are conveyed equally in egg and sperm.

And she explores the mythical assumptions to the contrary:

What we should note at this point is that neither gamete (i.e. egg and sperm) can be regarded as superior to the other; when they unite, both lose their individuality in the fertilised egg. There are two common suppositions which - at least on this basic biological level - are clearly false. The first - that of the passivity of the female - is disproved by the fact that new life springs from the union of the two gametes; the living spark is not the exclusive property of either. The nucleus of the egg is a centre of vital activity exactly symmetrical with the nucleus of the sperm. The second false supposition

contradicts the first - which does not seem to prevent their co-existence. It is to the effect that the permanence of the species is assured by the female, the male principle being of an explosive and transitory nature. As a matter of fact, the embryo carries on the germ plasma of the father as well as that of the mother, and transmits them together to its descendants under now male, now female form. It is so to speak, an androgynous germ plasma which outlives the male or female individuals that are its incarnations, whenever they produce offspring.

However although as far as the new human being is concerned, the bio-chemical determinants are equally divided between both parents, it is a different matter as far as the parents themselves are concerned. There is a contradiction both for male and female: after initially equal impetuses and equal contribution (the sexual act) physical co-operation ends. But conception, and pregnancy and birth ensue - for the female alone. The male is as "excluded" from this part of the biological process of production as the female is "included". The male has no further biological role; while the female's role is still essential. However, this is a partial and temporary contradiction. Firstly, the female is not (and historically has not been) excluded by her biologically productive role from other social activities, though in general her body has to undertake extra responsibility.

The contradiction, such as it is, is between the male's essential but limited (involuntary) role, and the female's essential but protracted (involuntary) role. The contradiction resolves itself "naturally" and in theory socially: at the point of birth and the viability of the new human being. At the moment of birth the new human being's growth process changes from a physically linked system to another human being (the mother) to an independent, "viable" system: the baby breathes oxygen, instead of absorbing it via the placenta, its senses adapt to the responsiveness necessary to survive in a changing environment. It is certainly at this stage still totally dependent on 'adult' human beings for its survival, but it is no longer physically inter-related.

Thus once pregnancy and birth are over, theoretically the contradiction is well on its way towards resolution: both biological parents are now theoretically as 'free' to develop a social relationship to the new human being as any other human being. Or to put it another way round, other adults are as 'free' to develop a social relationship with the new human being as the biological parents. (This applied even when human infants were totally dependent on breastmilk - it is not their "natural" mother's milk on which they depend, but on the milk of women who have given birth; so although in this case the possibilities were more limited, they were certainly social possibilities.)

It seems thus possible to say that there is a contradiction between men and women insofar as they relate to the process of biological production. It is a temporary contradiction, which affects the female physically and directly, and affects the male indirectly and negatively (he does and cannot take part whereas the female does and must). Since the instinct is identical, the contradiction temporary, the resolution spontaneous, we can say that the contradiction exposed is in a very real sense a non-antagonistic contradiction, a contradiction among the people.

The Social Relations of Biological Production

So far I have written about biological production as though it is a mechanical and totally unchanging relationship. Obviously it is much more than that. At its simplest it is a "biological fact", and it is true that historically this crude "fact" has remained unchanged: sperm still unites with ovum in the female body as a result of sexual intercourse, pregnancy must ensue in the female body for the new human being to develop, and it is still born spontaneously.

What have changed are the social relations of biological production; which is what we mean when we talk of "the history of the family". From Engels in *THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY* (given many of its limitations) through all kinds of literature and political interpretations, it is obvious to us that despite the efforts of religious and other ideologies the forms in which people have lived together and produced and cared for new human beings have changed. Reasons and interpretations are varied, but it needs little historical ferreting to discover that in the past the nuclear "ideal" family of Mum, Dad and 2.3 children was far from the norm. If the basic mode of biological production has remained unchanged, then it cannot have been the cause of that change.

If the mode of biological production has not determined that change in the last resort, and we still follow the reasoning of historical materialism, then the ultimate determinant of the changes in the social relations of biological production must be the changes in the mode of economic production - the means to sustain life.

However, in case that should sound like a headlong dive into economic determinism after a long run-up, the argument is not yet over: there is a need to make a closer analysis of the historical relationship between these nodes:

...the term "historical materialism" to designate that view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important historic events in the economic development of society, in the changes in the mode of production and exchange, in the consequent division of society into distinct classes and in the struggle of these classes against one another.

(Engels, *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific*)

The economic development of society, the increased and increasing control over the production of the means to sustain life, has developed through a series of economic revolutions, all of which have involved the exploitation of one class by another. We cannot say that class exploitation began with sex exploitation; if it had, then there would always have been sex oppression in all societies, and there seems to be sufficient evidence (again from *THE ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY* and later work by anthropologists) to indicate that this is not so.

As Engels also indicates in *The Origin of the Family*, the development of the monogamian family came about with the development of surplus (produce, not value), exchange of that surplus and the growth of private property. Private property means in fact the seizure of the right of privileged access to the means to sustain life; linked with this was indeed the monogamous family, to ensure the recognition of paternity in order for the owners

of the private property to hand down a privileged right to survival to their own successors. The question here arises as to whether men therefore also "seized" control of women, by the development of the principle of monogamy for women but not for men. I think this is a complex matter; but on the whole (apart from perhaps in the ruling classes or in other specific cases) I don't think it can be said that men "own" women in the sense that capitalists "own" the means of production; there may have been historic moments when some men totally controlled all aspects of some women's lives, but the relationship is closer to a slave-master relationship than a capitalist-worker relationship.

The control over the means of production, now in the hands of capitalism after the development from handicraft in the middle ages, through manufacture and up to modern industry, therefore means primarily the control of the production of the means to sustain life. Although with the developments of technology and science those means are becoming increasingly sophisticated, and so-called "man-made" materials and chemicals are used for food, clothing shelter, and medicine, the basic interaction is still that between human economic and social organisation and the environment - "nature"; obviously this is a historically determined relationship, and its current internal definition is that it is a predominantly capitalist (imperialist) system of human social organisation.

The need for more raw materials from "nature" to sustain life, in the context of a system in which the majority (working class) are subordinate to the minority (ruling class) has meant that there has been immense "progress" made in terms of control over the means to sustain life; we understand more about nutrition, about cultivation, about industrial processes, about medicine. But this knowledge is controlled by those who control the means of economic production, whose economic interest is the extraction of surplus value through the exploitation of human labour power.

This has meant the exploitation of entire classes - which include men, women and children. However, we know that the form that exploitation has taken differs for all three "categories" - men, women and children.

However sophisticated the mode of economic production is (or would potentially be if its resources and products were in the control of those who produce them - the workers), it has not been necessary for it to turn its attention (or perhaps possible) until very recently to the "control" and modification of the process of biological production. This has happened "spontaneously" - the quality of consciousness necessary to produce new members of the species is closer to that of other "animals", than to the kind of human consciousness which has been able to develop the complex forms of control over the means of production we see now.

The Contradiction of Sexism

It seems, therefore, that there has been a fundamental contradiction between the revolutions in the modes of economic production and those in the modes of biological production. In fact it might be truer to say that there have been no revolutions in the mode of biological production. The way this has been reflected in social structures is in the fact that "sexism" has predated capitalism, and as we know, can continue in modified forms after socialist revolutions.

What there have been are a series of modifications to the social relations of biological production (the family and socialisation processes) which have been the result of economic revolutions.

I would therefore define "sexism" here as primarily the historically determined contradiction between economic production and biological production, not between "men" and "women"; obviously this needs to be developed much more thoroughly, and I don't feel equipped to do so here. But I would suggest three pieces of evidence for this contradiction - in which economic development has literally been revolutionised at a tremendous speed (especially in the last 200 years) while biological production has moved far more slowly: the first is the violent contradiction between the social organisation under capitalism for economic production (social production, collective, non-biological co-operation) and the family (privatised, isolated, biological one man one woman co-operation).

This contradiction between the organisation of interdependent social processes ("work" and "family") and the consequently increased intervention of the state in the family process has, certainly in Britain, revealed the contradictions in the ideology of sexism (which arise from the contradiction outlined above). It would account now for the strain of the "idealised" male and female roles on which consumerist capitalism partly depends to sell its products, as people experience the material reality of the opposite: the demands of capitalism and state intervene more and more in the ideal of the "family", the stereotyped restrictive heterosexual morality (idealised again) contradicts the material pressures to which most people are now subject.

The third contradiction (which has also emerged from the scientific developments under capitalism) is that both the ideology of sexism and the social relations of biological production are being questioned as a result of the development of contraception, abortion and ways of controlling infant mortality and the life process as a whole in modern medicine - illness, death. The controlled possibility of separating sexuality (social relations) from biological production means that the ideology of heterosexuality for the sake of the species no longer holds up, and holds the possibility of wider choices for all kinds of sexual relationships.

In other words, it is the violence of specific contradictions under capitalism that has made it possible for us now to discern the historic development of the contradiction between economic production and biological production; i.e. it is the historical materialist principle applied to an analysis of the material basis of sexism and its ideology.

(Note: both religious and secular literature reflect this contradiction between the degree of control developed over the modes of economic and biological production: for the last 2000 years there has been little change in the way they have seen male/female relationships, sexuality and procreation. This is consistent with the theory of sexism I have outlined above; on the other hand natural and social sciences have come a long way since Jesus Christ Supergod.)

The Contradiction between Men and Women:

As I suggested earlier, there is a temporary contradiction involved in the process of biological production itself; but whereas the male is not visibly, physically or directly affected, the female is visibly, physically and directly affected - temporarily. The degree to which each is affected is historically determined.

However, as the primary contradiction between the modes of economic and biological production has become more and more antagonistic, the female has become the biological custodian of that contradiction, which then appears to become an antagonistic contradiction, between men and women; in fact, it is not absolutely antagonistic, but has antagonistic aspects. (For a fuller historical analysis of this development in Britain, see Sheila Rowbotham's book *Hidden from History*, Pluto Press, £1.50.)

The answer is not a simple recommendation to bring the mode of biological production into line with the mode of economic production - that is the line that ultimately leads to test-tube babies, and even if that is a possibility for the far distant future, it is itself partial, and ignores the determining power of economic development in changing the social relations of biological production.

Women are thus caught in two contradictions; both the primary contradiction (under capitalism expressed as between capital and labour, in which I suggest that "labour" in its general sense can be taken to refer to the process Engels described in the quote I used on p.); women have always been involved at the point of economic production and thus have both a specific interest (theoretical and political) in working for the resolution of that contradiction, which has determined the social relations of the secondary contradiction.

However, women are also custodians of that secondary contradiction (directly affected), and thus for them the two contradictions assume equal weight and interdependence. They must therefore attack the second contradiction with equal force, as the interdependence of the two contradictions finds its location in the biological and economic role of women. We must make that custody without responsibility a political reality, and demand responsibility taking into account the total nature of sexism, and developing tactics with which to demand

political and social resolution from men. The "natural" resolution has been made impossible; our answers must be social and political.

Autonomy and the Strategy against Sexism

The contradiction of which women are custodians applies to all women in general, whatever their race or class. It comes about as a result of the general contradiction between the historic processes necessary to produce human life itself, and the means to sustain that life. The social relations of both those processes are determined by the second - the economic mode of production "in the last resort". However, since those modes of economic production have been revolutionised as a result of class struggle, women have been divided (along with men, children and inhabitants of colonies through imperialism) along class lines.

However, the development of sexism (as I have defined it) has meant that women of all classes (to one degree or another) are still custodians of their specific contradiction. Hence the subordination of women to men even within the ruling class (and the ideology to support that).

There is thus a structural need and possibility for all women to unite on the basis of their shared contradiction, and to fight that contradiction wherever they may find themselves. However, the contradictions contained within the present mode of economic production (capitalism and imperialism) mean that class, race, cultural contradictions are also there to be fought; & this means also that ultimately (i.e. after a socialist revolution) it will be the class position of women and men which will determine the nature of the social relations of both economic and biological production.

However, ultimately is some way off, and the chief role of the women's movement is a struggle against sexism, in all its aspects, in its material (biological and economic) points of production and ideological points of focus. This involves both defensive and offensive action, to resolve both the secondary and primary contradictions I have tried to distinguish between. This does not mean that there is a question of priority; both are totally interrelated, and must be seen as interrelated if the primary contradiction of sexism (between modes of economic and biological production) were to be resolved.

Defensive Action

Included in this are all aspects of "equal rights" demands; pay, employment, educational opportunities, legal, political and social rights. These define "equal rights" as "catching up" with men - within the given inequalities of the class system. A second part of the defensive action concerns those aspects of the contradiction between men and women which have become antagonistic, and concern contraception, abortion and childcare. It is a beginning towards socially demanding the freedoms which men biologically have (i.e. decision over pregnancy), and which men socially have in relation to children (this is a social resolution to a historically created problem).

This defensive action has constitutional limitations; and for women in the movement who are socialists there are other areas of "equal" rights defensive action which contain the implication of something beyond that; and that is the right within union organisations to demand the recognition of their presence and power.

Offensive

The dividing line between defensive and offensive action becomes, beyond a certain point, difficult to distinguish. But if we agree that the original (temporary) biological contradiction was a contradiction for men as well as for women, then we must agree that as that contradiction has developed antagonistic aspects, men have been affected as well as women. That is to say, sexism is about the material and ideological relationship between men and women, and men must change as well as women. However, the offensive must (and has) come from women; we must demand from men that they participate in the resolution of both the primary and secondary contradictions between men and women. Crudely we have identified this as fighting male chauvinism, but it is a complex and difficult process, and involves the necessary base of an autonomous women's movement to cope with the many antagonistic aspects.

It also involves a self-offensive: reclaiming ourselves from subordinate positions, claiming power over our lives and political interests.

This would need more detailed discussion to bring out tactical and strategic problems - i.e. the relationship of the women's movement to unions, male-dominated organisations; the relationship of the women's movement to the gay movement (an extremely vital form of other kinds of social/sexual relationships which also point to the resolution of the temporary contradiction between men and women).

It might be worth a note here on the way in which demand for contraception, abortion and control of childcare can be transformed from defensive to offensive action: women cannot seize control of the means of biological production as men are necessarily involved, even if only initially - directly. Therefore the contradictions within sexism must be fought in specific relationships (marriage, living together, or communal) as well as in the political running of socialised childcare; women must demand of men that they take part in the resolution, in actively breaking down their side of the contradiction, not simply in passive "support" of the women's movement. It is not simply a contained ideological battle, but a political struggle which is necessary if the primary contradiction in sexism is to be resolved. In the course of the struggle for sexual self-determination which also arises out of this last point, the link is made with the gay movement - with the social and political resolution of what I have called the "temporary" contradiction between men and women, initiated by women who have become the custodians of the antagonistic aspects of that contradiction, we move towards collective control of the power to control biological production and to a transformation of the social relations of biological production.

Micheline Wandor

The following last section of the paper was re-written after the Conway Hall conference; however, since it is another approach to the questions raised in this last section, it was thought better to include it along with the original version. The heading below replaces the heading "The Contradiction of Sexism" on p.

The Primary Contradiction of Sexism

It seems, therefore, that there has developed an antagonistic contradiction rooted in the relatively uneven development of the social relations of economic and biological production. It seems true to say that we are, at this historic moment, at the beginning of a political revolution in the mode of biological production (related to the progress of medical science). On the other hand, there have been a number of revolutions in the economic mode of production (of the means of subsistence), and these in turn have directly affected the social relations of biological production (the family and the processes of socialisation).

The most obvious practical consequence of this unevenness in the development of revolutions in the production and reproduction of life, has been what we recognise as the separation between "work" (economic production) and "the family" (biological production). And the differences (division of labour developing into contradictions developing into antagonisms?) between the modes of production have given rise to different social relations - the extreme social nature of mass production, the extreme (at the moment in its ultimate form - the nuclear family) - privatisation of biological production - one man, one woman, 2.3 average kids.

As we have seen from the previous analysis, the two modes of production are socially inter-dependent - one cannot exist without the other. Men and women are essential to both, but their relatively distinct roles (the point of "natural" contradiction in the biological mode of production) has meant (because of the uneven development described above) that women have become the historical custodians of the contradiction between the two modes of production.

In other words, sexism has been the systematic historic development of social sex roles, based on the developing contradiction between the modes of economic and biological production. The primary antagonism of sexism has thus affected both men and women; both men and women have always been involved in both productive processes, which, with the development of capitalism have become increasingly separated from each other. The material basis for sexism in both its material and ideological aspects lies here, and this is the primary and increasingly antagonistic contradiction.

The Secondary Contradiction of Sexism

The fact that women have become the historical custodians of the contradiction arising out of the uneven development of the modes of biological and economic production, gives rise to the secondary contradiction - that which appears to be between "men" and "women".

Women's essential, and until very recently, involuntary role in biological production, has meant that the revolutions in economic production have affected them (us) in a way distinct from men. Women have always been involved in both modes of production, and have always been essential to both modes of production - they have therefore always assumed a double burden of responsibility, and in the context of capitalist social relations, a double exploitation - a secondary economic, social and ideological status.

The previous point about the nature of women's double exploitation arises out of the kinds of revolutions that have taken place in economic production; they have been revolutions which have come about as a result of class struggle in which (apart from recent exceptions of the USSR, China, Cuba) class exploitation has been an essential component; and classes include men, women and children.

However, the historic development of sexism (as I have outlined it) has meant that women of all races and classes are still (to one degree or another) custodians of their specific contradiction. So that the secondary contradiction of sexism (the "natural" and theoretically resolveable one in the biological mode of production) is perpetuated throughout all classes, and means that all women are theoretically united by sharing this secondary contradiction. This is what accounts for the fact that in all classes men and women have different roles, and that even in the ruling class, on the whole women are ideologically, socially and econ-

omically subordinate to the men of their class.

So women are on the one hand united in respect of the fact that they share aspects of both the primary and secondary contradictions of sexism; and are on the other divided by the fact that they are members (in their own right, or by association with men) of specific classes, which are antagonistic to each other. In terms of sexuality, procreation, job and education opportunities, pay, all women in general share their relative position within their class; inferior, in relation to the men of that class.

Thus, while we can see that theoretically all women have a similar interest in uniting to seize control of that custodianship, it is also clear that the process of uniting will in itself throw up (as it already has in the women's movement) the contradiction of class interest. This is because (as I pointed out earlier) the social relations of biological production - the family - are determined finally by the economic mode of production. The nuclear family is the logical end of the antagonism between the two modes of production, and women are the link between the two which is taking the strain of the antagonism.

Autonomy and Sexism - Defensive "Unequal Rights"

To refer back to a phrase used at the beginning of the paper: when we speak in general of "coming together around our oppression as women", we mean that all of us, as women, have a specific interest in combating sexism, as it touches us in our class. We can share the general experience of being ideologically oppressed, of being treated as sex objects, as inferior by the men in our class. The ideology of motherhood as an unwaged career, as right and natural for the child, has served to try and convince all of us as women to maintain our elastic role in two modes of production, and unites us on the shared need to decide for ourselves what happens to our bodies in respect of procreation - to demand contraception and abortion, to demand the right of unsupported mothers (class advantage here becomes especially precarious for the middle-class woman economically dependent on her husband, who is then economically flung down a class if the marriage breaks up) to a living allowance/wage/income from the state; to equal opportunities in education and work, to equal pay - all these, which cover the Four Demands formulated at the beginning of the growth of the movement have, on one level, a unifying effect. They are demands to which every woman in theory can respond. They are demands which she can make from within her own situation, whatever her class, and derive benefit from them.

They are only "equal rights" in the broadest sense, to which one must always add the specific, concrete qualification - they are demands for equality with men, which can be fought for through constitutional means, which can be demanded from the government of the day. All of them, if "won", would benefit all women - but would benefit them in different ways, according to their class position and thus if won would also reveal themselves as "unequal" rights.

So the necessity of autonomy for a broad-based women's movement is the need to fight the secondary contradiction of sexism - that which appears to be between "men" and "women" in their particular classes, both at work and in the family. The self-necessity for autonomy is also expressed within the historic context of the growth of the labour movement, movements for bourgeois civil rights, into which feminist demands - the demands that take women's custodianship of the contradictions of sexism into account - have never been integrated. Historically we have seen how women have always had to fight from their own oppression, for their own rights/liberation, and in the process have had to combat the effects of sexism on men. The enemy of sexism (not "men") in male chauvinism is pervasive. It can also be asserted that the irony of the present situation - members of the male-dominated left groups who argue against an autonomous women's movement - stems from the fact that feminism is only taken seriously by right and left alike, when women organise separately from men; thus showing men themselves the mystificatory nature of their own position; attacking in practice the ideology that men are always superior and in control. Women seizing control of their own politics not only liberate themselves from their subordinate position, they also liberate men from the consolatory (for the working class) position of at least being better than a woman, however lousy the rest of their lives.

Autonomy and Offensive Tactics

The dividing line between defensive - unequal rights demands, based on autonomous organisation and offensive is a fine one; I'd suggest that it would be determined by the nature of the political position from which those demands are made (Lenin in WHAT IS TO BE DONE? and LEFT-WING COMMUNISM, AN INFANTILE DISORDER are relevant points of departure for discussion here).

If we agree that sexism is an objective condition, which affects men as well as women adversely (but in different ways) then it is clear that an offensive to resolve both the primary and secondary contradictions involves more than a movement towards equal rights' self-determination for women in present society.

The demand for equal rights with men (whatever the social institution) sets rolling an explosive revolutionary potential. Achieving in practice any of those rights, on both individual and collective levels is in itself exemplary of the fact that women are NOT inferior, not less intelligent, less politically able than men. Men (of all classes) are thus implicitly attacked by the very existence of such movements or organisational demands. They are forced to confront sexism within themselves. One of the arguments made by separatist radical feminists is precisely for the overwhelming power of this position. Show men (left, right and centre) that we don't need them, and they'll think again. And indeed this is a point; but it is only a beginning.

The objective contradiction for an autonomous women's movement is the fact that society is divided along class lines, as well as sex/race. However, women's objective custodianship of the primary and secondary contradictions of sexism requires that women demand of men that they too partake in the resolution. Again, the nature of those specific demands varies with the class position of the women making the demands. A middle-class couple can rearrange housework and child-care to be shared; equal opportunities at the top of the Beeb and other media are demanded by sections of Women in Media. However, women at the lower levels of the media - cleaners, canteen workers, secretaries, would, if organised, perhaps present demands which question even at a limited level of class consciousness, the whole notion of hierarchy as it is at present observed.

For Marxist-feminists in the movement the sex/class contradiction is a prevailing companion to all political activity. The workshop based on this paper at Conway Hall revealed many of the questions; if we accept the need for an autonomous women's movement (on the basis of whatever definition) and we are also Marxists and committed to the class struggle, how, first of all, do we define our political relationship to each other as Marxist-feminists with different political priorities? Women not especially active in the women's movement as such have been profoundly affected by its existence, and yet in some ways could indirectly be threatening its potential. It is in this context that the question of dual membership (mentioned at the beginning of the paper) arises. It is already a fact for many women - active both in the context of the women's movement and any one of the "groups" - and theoretically if such a tendency developed it would be a non-sectarian feminist alliance. In a sense this alliance unofficially exists, but it does so on the territory, as it were, of the autonomous women's movement. Both the conferences at Birmingham and Conway Hall were organised by women based in Women's Liberation, and there seemed to be a mixture of co-operation and competition, based not, I think on simple paranoia that some women were there to "recruit", but on the objective fact that different political positions are represented, many of which contain contradictions of which many of us are well aware.

The question following an explicit recognition of a feminist alliance, would be what effect would it have on the male-dominated groups themselves? The key to this is, I think, how Marxist-feminists in the movement develop the offensive areas of political action, and also the way, in which women change their individual lives and relationships in the context of collective politics. In this latter area one of the demands which may perhaps lead most easily from defensive to offensive is linking the demand for contraception and abortion to child-care, and to breaking down, both within the individual family, and on a collective level (nurseries, etc) the female/mothering social role. It is clear that women cannot seize control of the means of biological production (unless they advocate test-tube babies), but we can resolve the contradiction of which we are custodians; we can begin to make inroads on the social relations - the family, in terms of its stranglehold on sex roles, by demanding of men that they take part in the social resolution of the natural contradiction.

Conclusions

All the arguments and points mentioned in this last section need further expansion, analysis and discussion. If it is agreed that there is a theoretical and political basis for an autonomous, broadly-based women's movement, the next stage is to try and analyse its composition, and the extent of its potential.

At the moment the last part of the above question is speculative; we cannot set theoretical limits to the political potential of the movement. However, it is clear that some elements within the movement are already in danger of sectarian splitting - the most serious, perhaps,

is the vocal strength of separatist feminists who confuse autonomy with separatism and are thus in danger of alienating themselves from other feminists. The problems raised by a broad based autonomous women's movement mean that we have to recognise our differences and agree to work together on whatever the issue may be across those differences. At the same time we are developing other forms of unity; the growth of Marxist study groups and conferences such as these is perhaps one of the most important elements of such development.

And if the most important role of such a women's movement is a strategic assault on sexism, and a linking of such an assault with, and a transformation of, class struggle, then we have to get down to cases, analyse particular campaigns from a Marxist-feminist perspective, and in particular establish the links between the material basis for sexism and its ideology - and in turn the relationship of that to the class struggle.

Note:

Thanks to Ann Scott for helping to clarify (for me) the idea of applying the law of uneven development to the two "modes" of production. In writing this paper I realised how indebted I was to work done by a number of feminist historians, etc; in particular, I have found the discussions in the North London Political Study Group and Red Rag invaluable, and the following books as well as those acknowledged in the text: WOMAN'S ESTATE, by Juliet Mitchell, HIDDEN FROM HISTORY by Sheila Rowbotham.

Micheline Wandor

is the vocal strength of separatist feminists who continue to insist that we are thus in danger of alienating themselves from other feminists. The problems raised by a broad based autonomous women's movement mean that we have to recognize our differences and agree to work together on whatever the issue may be across those differences. At the same time we are developing other forms of unity; the growth of feminist study groups and conferences such as these is perhaps one of the most important elements of such development.

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Note:
 To this we add a note for helping to clarify (for me) the idea of applying the law of uneven development to the two "modes" of production. In writing this paper I realized how inadequate I was to work with a number of feminist theorists; in particular, I have found the discussion in the New York Times (1971) by Betty Friedan and the following books as well as those referred to in the text: WOMAN'S REBELLION, by Juliet Mitchell, 1971; WOMAN AND SOCIETY, by Betty Friedan, 1963.

Michèle Welter

AUTONOMY OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

We felt that there were three major areas in which autonomy could be discussed.

1. Theoretical autonomy
2. Organization autonomy
3. Tactical autonomy

Before discussing these in detail it seems necessary to analyse the relationship between the Women's movement, class economics and the working class struggle. If it can be shown that a large part of women's subordination springs from the fact that this is beneficial to a capitalist economy, then the women's movement and the working class struggle have a common cause, namely to overthrow capitalism. This then has important implications for any discussion of the autonomy of the movement - should we be autonomous from the working class struggle, class analysis, and thereby from socialism, left wing groups and men? So we have attempted to show in what ways the oppression of women is beneficial to capitalism, particularly in terms of the family; what effects this has on the personal subordination of women; and how these effects differ between working class and middle class women.

THE EFFECTS OF CAPITALIST ECONOMICS ON WOMEN

(1) The cost of caring for societies members is small within the family compared to what it might cost society, especially in unpaid female labour. It is the responsibility of the family to care for the members of society. This means women must be socialised to undervalue their potential and to aim to be housewives without economic independence. This involves lower motivation, lack of confidence and self-effacement. The effects of this re middle and working class women vary. Middle class women have greater resources to care for their families as society dictates, than do working class women. This means the middle class woman can come nearer to achieving her socialised role while the working class woman is merely frustrated.

(2) Hierarchy of power in the family is derived from the males' control of wealth. Because of this, children are initiated into an authoritarian structure which produces "good" obedient labour, the acceptance of authority at work. This means children must be suitably oppressed in the family as being its "lowest", i.e. non-productive, members and this is done mainly via the mother. Large numbers of children, working class children, must be socialized to accept lower aspirations and future standard of living than middle class children. Working class mothers are therefore frustrated in their attempts to obtain a better education and future for their children.

(3) Women are paid less at work because they are a source of cheap labour for employers and the family hierarchy is not disrupted by women having a good income and thereby economic power. For women, outside work remains secondary to house work and childcare. This means a lack of education and jobs for women which reinforces an underestimation of their abilities. This is true for middle and working class women but the former generally have a better education than the latter (though not as good as men's) and more choice of jobs available. Working class women are cleaners, do boring factory jobs and so are more dissatisfied than middle class women. Working class men are in a similar position to women of the same class but earn more for their alienating work.

(4) Since the women and children of the family are dependent on the wages of the men to survive they become a force against radical action at work since this threatens their livelihood. This is particularly true of women since it is their responsibility to meet day to day family needs. This means women are traditionally the conservative element in society - if the man rebels the position of the woman and her family is threatened. We are uncertain of the differing effects on working and middle class women: if more working class wives work than middle class this second income would perhaps mitigate this effect somewhat.

(5) The consumerism of individual families, e.g. in domestic appliances is far higher than in a communal life style and means greater demand for goods and more profits for capitalists. It is women who are mostly involved in consumerism especially on a day to day basis and therefore advertising is largely directed at women. The woman's status is directly linked to the affluence of the home. The middle class woman is in a better position to consume more and therefore raise her status whereas the working class woman is subject to the same advertising but cannot meet the ideal image.

(6) It is necessary to the system for women not to recognise their common oppression as this retains the status quo. Women are therefore socialized to relate primarily to men and because of this have difficulties in their relationships to other women. This seems to apply to both working and middle class women equally.

We are aware that this analysis does not explain all aspects of women's oppression; for example, it does not explain sexuality. While capitalism is one cause of women's subordination, it is not the only one and this must be taken into account when developing a theoretical framework for the women's movement which we have not gone into here.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AUTONOMY AND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

THEORETICAL AUTONOMY So far there has been no adequate theory on the women's question supplied by the major socialist/marxist writers. While the women's movement needs an economic analysis to be provided by socialist theory, we nevertheless need to develop a women's theory because there are areas of oppression that don't appear to be specifically economic or capitalist, most obviously the sexual side. Because of our particular experience of oppression as women we need to develop an autonomous theory.

ORGANISATIONAL AUTONOMY Autonomy is a practical necessity because of the need for women to become aware of their oppression as women and to develop a consciousness. Since women have a history of subordination in mixed organizations it is necessary to exclude men from the movement. There are also important political reasons for remaining organisationally autonomous. The Women's Movement can act as a protective power base for women's interests to insure that these interests are not forgotten, brushed aside or betrayed as in the past.

TACTICAL AUTONOMY We feel that the women's movement should be the central focus from which all kinds of action could emanate with women, mixed groups, Trade Unions, left groups, etc. So the movement would aim at both organising women and intervening in any sexist situation and any radical action seen as progressive within our framework. We see the tactics of the Women's movement as derived from the analysis above, perhaps falling into 4 areas:

- (a) Working with women both in the community and at work. Most women are in the community and have their major problems there.
- (b) Working against sexism in any organisation or group, whether mixed, male or female.
- (c) Working to involve men in what have been the traditionally female areas, e.g. childcare, prices, housework. As well as working with women in traditionally male areas.
- (d) Working to broaden the political perspective away from just immediate reformist issues by relating specific issues back to the economics of capitalism and hopefully to an as yet underdeveloped theory of sexism.

CONCLUSION

We have tried to show that feminism and the working class struggle do have a common cause. Through our analysis we have indicated that working class women are the most oppressed and dissatisfied and are therefore possibly the major potential force in the struggle against sexism. The movement must therefore direct its energy towards working class women and the women within mixed proletarian mass organizations.

We must express doubts that the women's movement as it stands can be effective in any of these outlined areas because of the lack of any framework or co-ordinated theory to work from. These problems spring directly from the conflicts between women within the movement with different ideologies.

Hopefully ways and means of overcoming these problems and aiming towards a more organized movement will be a major point of discussion at the conference.

(Hackney Women's Group)

THE AUTONOMY OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

INTRODUCTION

At this conference, for socialists in the movement, there are certain things we can assume as the starting point for any discussion:

1) That whether we started from an interest in countering the oppression of women, and came to an understanding that this could only be achieved within the context of overthrowing the capitalist system; or whether we started out as revolutionaries who came to see the struggle for women's liberation as an integral part of the revolutionary struggle; we have in common an understanding of the need to overthrow the capitalist system.

2) Therefore we would also agree that women's oppression is rooted in the society in which we live, and not in some eternal male/female antagonism. And that the overthrow of capitalism is a necessary prerequisite for the liberation of women.

But what exactly do we mean by the overthrow of capitalism? Does the capitalist system have to be overthrown by a revolution of the working class, and other forces opposed to capitalism, or can it be taken over in stages, or reformed out of existence? The recent tragic events in Chile have demonstrated that the peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism effectively disarms the masses, literally, and theoretically and prepares the way for the capitalist order to re-establish its dominance.

This paper takes as its starting point the need for the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist system and the capitalist class, because political and economic power will not be given up voluntarily by those who wield it and profit by it.

But underlying even this measure of agreement, if it exists, there is a whole series of analyses; in order to clarify whatever differences may exist, and attempt to resolve them, we felt it necessary to clarify:

- (a) the nature of the capitalist state
- (b) the nature of the socialist revolution
- (c) the nature and role of the revolutionary party.

A. THE NATURE OF THE CAPITALIST STATE

When it comes to defining the nature of the capitalist state, there are several misconceptions both within the left, and about the left, which have to be cleared up.

(i) Within the left: Some groups on the left take literally Marx's statement about the state being "armed bodies of men" and see the main function of the state as being the physical defence of the means of production, i.e. the role of the state is only seen in terms of its relationship to the industrial working class, organised at the point of production. (The corollary of this is to see the socialist revolution in terms of the industrial working class versus the rest of society, plus a few irrelevant groups).

But this view relegates something like the Women's Liberation Movement at best to the periphery of the revolutionary struggle, and at worst characterises it as a diversion from that struggle. Therefore that section of the left which in their propaganda and their practice take up these positions vis a vis the Women's Liberation Movement, do so not merely from male chauvinist backwardness, but because they have a wrong analysis of the nature of the capitalist

state, and flowing from that, of the socialist revolution and the revolutionary party.

What then is the capitalist state? When Marx talks about "bodies of armed men" he means the state having a monopoly of legitimate violence; having at its disposal, as a last resort (apart from the question of the role of the police, legal system, etc.) this legitimised physical force. But this would not explain how in periods of relative stability and social peace the capitalist order prevails without recourse to such means. The capitalist system has many tools at its disposal. Wage differentials separate workers from one another in terms of immediate material interests; the absence of socialisation of labour, the position of women in the family separate the material interests of men from women; shortage of jobs separates the interests of the employed from the unemployed, and breeds racialism in the working class etc.

And so it is not enough to examine the role of the state in terms of its defence of the means of production, we must also understand the importance of bourgeois ideology and institutions of the bourgeois state, e.g. the family in terms of the role they play in defence of the relations of production, i.e. the exploitative relationship between the capitalist class which owns the means of production - the workers tools; and the working class which owns nothing but labour power which it must sell on the market to survive.

The family, for example, defends the relations of capitalist production in that it both physically reproduces the new labour force and sustains the existing one; and by its very structure trains the working class in an acceptance of the divisions in society (between classes, and within the working class) i.e. between men and women, between earners and non earners etc., as the "natural order of things" and similarly with the relationship between the classes.

Thus to overthrow the capitalist state, and institute an alternative workers state, it is necessary to extend the struggle beyond the factories. In the overthrow of the capitalist state the role of the working class is central, (see Section B), but not one of splendid isolation. Because the state defends more than just the means of production, it cannot be overthrown just from the point of production. Therefore all those who are exploited and oppressed under capitalism have more than just a peripheral, supportive role to play.

As Trotsky said in the Transitional Programme (p.30) : "The deepening of the social crisis will increase not only the suffering of the masses, but also their impatience, persistence and pressure. Ever new layers of the oppressed will raise their heads and come forward with their demands. Millions of toil worn 'little men' to whom the reformist leaders never give a thought will begin to pound insistently on the doors of the workers movement. The unemployed will join the movement, the agricultural workers, the ruined and semi-ruined farmers, the oppressed of the cities, the women workers, housewives, proletarianised layers of the intelligentsia - all of these will seek unity and leadership. How are the different demands and forms of struggle to be harmonised...? History has already answered this question, through Soviets. They will unite the representatives of all the fighting groups...soviets ...throw open the doors to all the exploited. Through these doors pass representatives of all strata drawn into the general current of the struggle."

It is as well to note here, to the question of how to harmonise the struggles Trotsky does not answer: "Join the party" as many groups on the left do. Instead he points to the institutions of dual power which gathered together the representatives of the different groups involved in the struggle.

Thus women, organised as women, around questions which concern their situation in capitalist society, have a role to play in this struggle, as one of the "fighting groups". And thus the existence of an autonomous movement can be defended in terms of an analysis, not just a belief in our own importance.

The state is not neutral, nor is it merely a collection of institutions. So it is not possible to merely change those institutions, or aspects of the state, which particularly oppress one section of society, to solve the problems of that group. e.g. it is not possible to change the role and structure of the family in a vacuum. Nor would it be possible to rely on the neutrality of the rest of the state while this was going on. The state as a whole must be taken on and overthrown, and thus a fusion of the struggles of the exploited and oppressed is necessary. Also an alternative state cannot represent only one section of society, even if this is the central force - the working class*. It must, as Trotsky outlines above, represent all the fighting groups (The Soviet being the embryo of the alternative state formation.)

(ii) These confusions and incorrect positions held within the left, lead to a certain practice which produces an understandable reaction from the Women's Liberation Movement; that these groups are really only interested in the struggles of the industrial working class; that they are only in the Women's Liberation Movement to recruit from it; that the women of the revolutionary left are there despite the politics and practice of their organisations, not because of them; that such organisations have nothing to offer them; and would in fact destroy or hinder their involvement in Women's Liberation, because membership of a male dominated group would mean subordinating one's interest in Women's Liberation to the dominant interests of this male dominated group.

It is not possible to say categorically all of this is false; clearly much of it is based on observable fact, or is near enough to make the assumption understandable. But all the groups must be examined in terms of their theory and practice. Since the oppression of women can and must be challenged everywhere, then it is not sufficient to judge everyone in terms of how they relate to the Women's Liberation Movement.

But the most important point to stress here is that the autonomy of the movement does not depend on the strict separation of membership of the left groups from the Women's Liberation Movement. Given the above analysis the left groups would have the position of defending the existence of the autonomous movement, and taking part in it, because they want to assist the development of all the fighting forces. There should be no conditions on this support, except ones of class principle; it should not be dependent, in other words, on how many recruits can be made in what period of time, although one is not of course opposed to recruiting. The role of the revolutionary party (see Section C) is not to incorporate all the available forces, but to give them leadership and fuse their struggles into the revolutionary struggle.

B. THE NATURE OF THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

Two points need clarifying here, again because of confusions both within and about the left.

1. What do we mean by the "central role" of the working class?
2. What therefore is the role of the other "fighting groups", in particular the Women's Liberation Movement?

1. The Central Role of the Working Class:

When Marx analysed capitalism he did so in terms of the two major classes in that society; bourgeoisie and proletariat. The bourgeoisie owns the means of production employs labour to work the means of production, and thus produce a commodity which when sold on the market realises a profit. The working class own nothing but labour power and exists by selling this on the market for wages (individual property does not rank with ownership of the means of production because it can only be consumed, albeit perhaps slowly, e.g. a house, a car, but cannot produce a surplus). The working class is a class of wage labourers; the bourgeoisie a class of exploiters.

The proletariat is that part of the working class which produces surplus value, i.e. those workers whose labour produces a commodity which realises a profit when sold on the market, e.g. car workers, or adds to the value of a product which realises a profit when sold on the market, e.g. car workers, or adds to the value of a product which realises a profit, e.g. transport workers.

In other words, clerical workers, workers in retail, service industries are wage labourers but not proletarians because they do not produce a commodity which can realise a profit. (Housewives produce values in the home which are immediately consumed within the home, not exchanged on the market - they produce use values, not surplus value. And because they do not sell their labour on the market but work privately in the home, etc., their work is not waged labour.)

Thus it is in the interests of the capitalist class to realise the maximum profit (i.e. increase the productivity of the workers' labour) and in the interests of the workers to maximise the return they get for their labour. i.e. their interests are diametrically opposed and irreconcilable. In periods of economic boom, their interests seem compatible, because the capitalists can spare enough from steadily increasing profits to keep the standard of living of the working class stable, or increase it (not increase the workers share of the total product, because this has not risen I think in the past 50 years at least, but as the standard of living of society as a whole rises, this is reflected within the working class).

But in a period of economic depression and crisis, the standard of living i.e. the value of real wages for the working class must be held down in order to maintain profits. In such a period the incompatibility of interests of the two classes becomes every more apparent. And given that the nature of capitalism leads it to spiralling economic crises, until the market system, based on profit becomes a constraint on the productive potential of society, the only long term solution for the working class is to overthrow the capitalist system.

The history of humanity is the history of one economic system being superceded by another and a corresponding shift in political power and social dominance from one class to another. But the overthrow of capitalism by the working class is unique in that political power will then be taken by the lowest social class, and the only way forward then is for the system of exploitation to end. Because a social system is based in the economic organisation of that

system, and a social class has dominance according to its relation to the economic system, that part of the working class organised by capitalist production at the point of production has a special role to play in the overthrow of capitalism. Numerically, organisationally, and because of its relation to production, the working class is the only force in capitalist society capable as a class of playing that role. Other sections of society are oppressed by capitalism but alone they are not capable of challenging the capitalist state for power. ||

2. But the working class also need allies. Because what it must do in order to secure victory is not just seize control of the means of production. It must also wrest political power from the hands of the capitalists; it must overthrow that state, and its institutions, it must set up its own bodies of armed men to defend the gains made in the struggle; and it must set up an alternative state. This requires the fusion of the struggles of the industrial working class, and the other fighting groups in struggle, and also in bodies of dual power - soviets. But how does the struggle unfold? The working class, organised at the point of production, is mainly concerned with the trade union struggle. Other sections of the working class are concerned with their own immediate problems; women are concerned with housing, rents, prices, childcare, etc. and with countering the oppression of women; blacks are concerned with the problems of the black community, countering racism and black oppression etc. How do these struggles fuse?

(a) The United Front

United activity with other forces on a particular issue in order to maximise the forces available on that issue. This does not mean that differences between these groups are buried, but that they recognise that on a particular issue they have agreement on which to organise common activity.

Such united front activities strengthen the forces available, and bring together a variety of forces in the one campaign. In the present period this is very important, especially considering the weakness of the forces considered in isolation from one another. But it cannot be equated with the fusion of the various struggles. A prices committee set up jointly by a housewives committee and a trades council is an excellent development, but is not the same as housewives organised as a force to carry out a general strike for example which would topple the government, or extending such a struggle through councils of action to overthrow the capitalist state.

(b) The Revolutionary Party

The role of the revolutionary party in fusing the various struggles into one will be discussed further in Section C.

Again, misunderstandings and mistakes on the left can lead to mistaken attitudes to this question of linking up and fusing struggles. It is not enough to recognise that this is necessary. It is also necessary to understand how it can be achieved. If one has an incorrect understanding of what is meant by the "central role" of the working class, it can lead to such demands as "Orange and Green unite and fight" in connection with the situation in Ireland, or "Black and white unite and fight" directed at the black militants. The fact that a large part of the organised working class in Northern Ireland is Orange should not obscure the fact that they are, in that situation, playing a reactionary role on the side of British imperialism; now should the fact that the British working

class is largely white make us blind to the fact that there is a strong racist current in that working class. And so while such unity is what we would all like to see, to make such demands is not to further that potential unity, or to make much of an impact on the attitudes of the Orangemen/racist white workers. In fact what such demands really mean is that those forces fighting against their oppression should hold back their struggle until the agents of their oppression have a change of heart and decide to join them. Lenin fought against those Social Democrats who wanted to play down the nationalist and peasant struggles as being diversions from the main struggle on the grounds that such struggles, when pushed to their utmost, undermined the stability of the capitalist system and could act as an example for the working class (e.g. the student struggle May '68 in France, and the re-introduction of many tactics of struggle into the working class movement through the student example - occupations, flying pickets, etc.). The same thing applies to the women's movement. We should not be diverted from organising and pursuing the struggle against women's oppression on the grounds that it is splitting women off from men, dividing the forces along sex lines, etc. The problem is that such division already exists, and we will not counter it by waiting passively for some mythical surge of awareness on the part of men, or on the part of the organised working class. We will help to develop such an awareness by our public activities, by our analysis of the situation of women, by demonstrating that we can organise, can fight and can make a theoretical contribution, as well as by initiating united activities around issues related to the oppression of women.

C. THE ROLE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To determine what the needs are of the situation, we must recognise the nature of the capitalist class and the capitalist state. The enemy is organised, centralised, experienced, with all the forces of the state at its disposal. To imagine that such an enemy can be overthrown spontaneously is to romanticise, and disarm, the forces which will be challenging it.

We know from our experience in the Women's Liberation Movement that to look to the unions for our salvation is foolish. Nor are the unions capable of achieving victory in the name of the industrial working class because we have already looked at the nature of the state, and of the form of struggle necessary to topple it. It cannot be conducted merely at the point of production, but must be waged as a common struggle, involving all the fighting forces and structured through bodies of elected representatives of all these forces. Therefore the struggle cannot be waged by one section of society alone, on behalf of all the others, or by all of them at different times, or by all of them tackling different aspects simultaneously. It must be fused, centralised, and the uneven development of consciousness must be countered. Above all this means it must have leadership and direction.

There is a tremendous resistance in the Women's Liberation Movement to the concept of "leaders" but this has to be distinguished from leadership. A resentment of self appointed leaders is understandable and correct. Also the hostility to the cult of leaders seen in the Soviet Union, China, North Korea etc. But it would be wrong to extend this into a rejection of "leadership". Again many of the misconceptions about the left are in fact a product of mistaken analysis and practice of the left. The revolutionary party is not that organisation on the left which calls itself the revolutionary party; it is not characterised by

its size (n thousand members); nor can an organisation justify setting itself up as the revolutionary party simply because the situation demands revolutionary leadership. Rather, it is that organisation which the masses recognise as a revolutionary leadership, which is rooted in the fighting masses in terms of membership and influence; and most important of all, which can and will give revolutionary leadership to them. The size of the party will not be an end in itself, or a justification in itself, but a product of the influence it has with the masses, the fact that it is capable of giving leadership to individual struggles, and of fusing the struggles into the revolutionary struggle to seize power. No single one of these characteristics is enough. A reformist party, no matter of what size, would not be the revolutionary party, because its politics and its programme would mean a constant capitulation to the pressures of capitalism. It must develop an analysis of capitalist society and the tasks necessary for its overthrow; must be able theoretically and practically to answer the problems posed by the struggle, generalise the experience of all sections of society into an overall strategy, and thus fuse all the separate struggles within the framework of the overthrow of capitalism.

How does the autonomous women's movement fit into this picture? It is not necessary, in order for the party to fulfil its functions that it incorporate all the forces in the struggle into its organisation, either in terms of all the members of the Women's Liberation Movement being members, or of Women's Liberation being simply an adjunct of the party. Therefore this is not the perspective. The Women's Liberation Movement organises a section of women, and through it, the demands it raises, the campaigns it engages in and the ideas it discusses helps to develop political understanding among a section of society not easily reached otherwise. Through its activities it organises and trains women to fight for their own rights and the rights of others. Because oppression is not simply a question of economics it can develop an understanding of the nature of the state, and the measures necessary to fight it. It also helps counter and compensate for the exceptionally difficult situations in which many women find themselves in terms of confidence, a recognition of their own potential, and helps them to generalise their own immediate experiences and translate them into a critical understanding of society. Thus such a movement has its own role to play in the struggle. What is important to remember is that it only has such a role to play within the general framework of the common struggle. As socialists, we are not interested in a women's movement regardless of its political colouration. We are concerned that the fight against women's oppression be made part and parcel of the fight for socialism, and as socialists we recognise the potential of the women's movement for seeing that this is achieved.

Thus, autonomy from what can only be answered by situating the movement in the context of the struggle necessary to prepare the way for the liberation of women. The socialist revolution will not achieve it, but it is a necessary prerequisite. The movement can have an independent existence from left groups, from the organisations of the class, from the revolutionary party, but not from the struggle. And within that autonomy, it is important that one does not allow a sectarian trend to develop, which would isolate the movement from the possibilities increasingly opening up to link up, and in some cases partially fuse struggles. We should not refuse to take part, as a movement, in activities not immediately concerned with our demands and campaigns, and we should press for support from other left forces for our initiatives.

Also, although autonomy is in a sense a practical necessity, it is more than just that, because such a justification could be based on an empirical approach, what suits the needs of the moment, or a sectarian one, what suit the needs of women. But given that autonomy does not contradict a much broader analysis, then it is possible to see it in terms of that analysis and in terms of the needs of the overall strategy of the revolutionary struggle, which is much more than practical necessity.

Celia Pugh, Linda Smith (IMG)
September 1973

* In each of the sections, an important aspect, that of internationalism, has not been covered, either in respect to capitalism as an international system, the need for world revolution nor the need for an international revolutionary party. This was because the scope of the paper already seemed wide enough (to say the least), but does not mean that we consider it unimportant or secondary.

C.P. & L.S.

At the last Women's Liberation and Socialism conference, several of us were arguing that critical membership of the "revolutionary" grouplets, and commitment to the women's liberation movement were compatible. Since then several of us have left the International Marxist Group (IMG). These are the reasons for leaving of three among us. Perhaps most sisters are aware of them. We don't want to put the IMG down especially among male dominated left groups. Indeed we feel that politically, had we to choose, it is marginally the best. But making that choice does not seem to us to be a woman's priority at the moment. After we left we read the article BREAD AND ROSES, in FROM FEMINISM TO LIBERATION, which explains it all very well. But some sisters may find this useful for discussion.

Revolutionary Runt

Sometimes known as the frightful bear (porcus tedius). Seems to be friendly, but treat with caution. A creature of contradictions, it can smell oppression at a distance of 5,000 miles, but remains unaware of the gunge itwallows in... (From SHREW, Pig Identification Chart.)

"The Leninist party, by demanding of its members that they become professional militants, imposes on them a certain style of living and a certain ethics. For this reason it is painful for a middle-class intellectual to become a working class militant, since to do so involves challenging many of his/her deepest notions, for example, the right to a private life, etc."

- Tessa Van Gelderen, Feminism or Marxism in IMG SOCIALIST WOMAN

1. In the versions of Marxist theory of the straight left (International Marxist Group, Socialist Labour League, International Socialist, Communist Party, Workers' Federation, Revolutionary Communist Party, Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist Leninist), Libertarians, et.al.), women's oppression is one of a number of oppressions produced by capitalist social relations. It has never received very great prominence, e.g. the lack of writings in the documents of the Fourth International. But in reproducing children, in bringing them up, in servicing male workers, in staffing the nursery and primary schools and the social services, women play an immense part for capitalism as reproducers of the relations of production (Try Althusser, LENIN AND PHILOSOPHY, article on State and Ideology). If we add to this that we are exploited and oppressed as 2/5 of the labour force in waged production (the figure varies from country to country), and oppressed as objects of a capitalist sponsored male defined sexuality, it is clear that women are not just another oppressed group, but a crucial group, i.e. not statistically, but politically half. The women's liberation movement is therefore nearly equivalent to the struggle in production in significance. This is nowhere recognised on the male left. Also as the economic struggles of 1971-2 became intense, so anything other than struggles in production became less and less significant for them ("Now we are entering the revolutionary epoch...")

2. A vitally important way of maintaining capitalism is the constant creation of division among its opponents. In this society, male personalities are built on assertion over others and oppression. So are ours to some extent, but because of our position we cannot avoid fighting it as we become politically conscious. Thus, the very operation of a male dominated revolutionary grouplet serves

to maintain capitalist ideology at the same time as its leaders inveigh against it. We used to think that the problem in the "Group" was women - the "woman question". They needed "help" to become more "politically advanced". We came to think that it was men who were the problem, having created a structure in which merit was accorded to those who were able to compete effectively against others in the game of political argument and forecasting. The working of the male left group is thus bourgeois and negates its aims. Within the terms of the straight left game, the advancement of women could only mean the development of male identified women who knew better how to put the rest of us down with the superiority of their political "line".

3. We were taught in the male left that political work and personal life were separate. A true revolutionary had no personal life (the new puritanism); lesser ones kept their personal lives in a separate compartment. Thus wives could be oppressed (in personal life), while women's oppression was condemned (in political life). To expect otherwise was utopian, since in a capitalist society, no human relations could be perfect (we can call this the Cop Out argument). But our personal lives are the experience of oppression. We can only fight our oppression by making our lives our political practice (e.g. consciousness raising). And that doesn't mean puritanism, either. (At the Bristol conference, the most revolutionary moments were precisely the Sister Show and the Disco, for this very reason. Because IMG sisters thought that politics and personal enjoyment were separate, they held a caucus during the Sister Show.)

4. Some sisters in IMG said "Stay and fight, the straight left and the women's movement are compatible". We respect their struggle. But we don't agree with it. For one thing, we tried for more than a year to develop a sensitivity in the Group to the women's movement, but the structure of the organisation made it impossible for us to express ourselves, leading to greater and greater frustration and feelings of personal inadequacy. At the end of that time, there were less women in the leadership, less attention was paid to our oppression than before. But when we went outside the IMG, showed in the liberated Socialist Woman that Marxism and Feminism are sisters, and dared to criticize the Group, then we made an impact. This is an indication of the opportunism in the male left generally. It wasn't until the current women's liberation movement started developing that the "woman question" became significant to them at all.

We also cannot give prime loyalty to a male dominated group in which policies and priorities are ultimately determined by men, and at the same time give unequivocal commitment to the women's movement. IMG sisters say rightly that women are in a majority on the women's commission of the IMG and that that body has some autonomy, but the autonomy is only because the IMG male leadership regards this "area of intervention" as relatively unimportant. It is true that sisters in the IMG present the movement with ideas which, as often as not, have been worked out without the men taking part, but that's only because work on women's oppression is a backwater. We never could get the "leading bodies" to discuss our documents. It is dishonest of sisters in the IMG to present the IMG to the movement as any different to what it seems in RED WEEKLY, in the interminable factional squabbles among would-be Trotskyist superstars and their acolytes (that's a Trot word) in the male leadership bodies. Come out, sisters. Stop "intervening", and make your contribution to your own movement.

5. If we don't join these organizations, should we have any relationship at all with them? Not believing that we alone can make a revolution, perhaps the time will come when we decide we want to intervene in the activities of the IMG and its brother (fratricidal) organisations, to subvert them for revolution; if we think it worth it. In the meantime, we believe our strength and our lives are best lived in relation to our movement, and that we get anything we think useful from the straight left, while maintaining a careful distance from its blandishments.

Wanda Maciuszko
Paula O'Flynn
Carol Riddell

WHY IS THERE A NEED FOR A SEPARATE BUT NOT AN AUTONOMOUS WOMEN'S MOVEMENT?

There has been a tendency in the women's movement to a polarisation into two opposing attitudes to the question of women's liberation. On the one hand there is the feminist view, which sees men as the main enemy and rejects a political stance, since politics are male-dominated. On the other hand there is a rigid 'socialist' position, which subjugates everything to a mechanical concept of class struggle and denies, in effect, that there is any special 'women' question, or any need for special struggle or organisation by women. In our view both these attitudes are incorrect. They are a reflection of the muddled thinking in the women's movement and the lack of an integrated theoretical understanding on which to base the struggle for change. It must be one of our prime tasks to develop such a theoretical understanding. Towards this end we will argue why the Women's Liberation Movement should be organisationally separate, but not autonomous, from the working class struggle.

Because women are oppressed specifically as women, economically, legally and culturally, they need to build their own organisations to understand and fight these oppressions.

As Alexandra Kollontai wrote before 1914:

The women proletarian movement has certain original features of its own, due to the particular conditions of existence of the woman worker and the particular social and political position of women in modern society.
(WOMEN WORKERS STRUGGLE FOR THEIR RIGHTS)

To fully understand the specific types of oppression encountered by women, we must analyse the different situations in which they occur.

1. Women's Oppression

Of prime importance is the question of the family unit. The development of the family plays a central role in relation to women's oppression. As clearly shown by Engels (ORIGIN OF THE FAMILY, PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE STATE) there are two main factors involved in the historical development of the family:

- (a) The transformation of the economy from a self-sufficient tribal economy to a market production economy under capitalism, and the development of private property (with different stages in between).
- (b) The development from group marriage to pairing family, and then from pairing family to monogamous family (again with various stages in between).

The domination of women by men is due to the fact that while men, through changes in the economic structure of society, were undergoing a change in occupations (i.e. from hunters to herdsmen) and therefore a change in their social role, status, etc., women performed the same job as ever (maintenance of the home and the bearing of children) but with a totally different social value attributed to it. Put simply, what in pre-class society was a public service, has become a private service.

Whereas in primitive society, where the economy is equally primitive, and generally self-sufficient, the work of women was given as high a status as that of men and consequently the social status

of women was as high as that of men in later forms of society. Domestic labour has been and still is considered economically unproductive to society. From this there follow two major points:

- (a) The social status of women is very low
- (b) This is reflected in bourgeois ideology, which has been used by the ruling class to its own advantage - to divide and rule.

The oppression of women is not only on a basic economic level (something which is generally accepted by all people on the "left") but is also on an ideological level, which is more subtle and difficult to combat.

Women at Home

The oppression of women in the home reflects class society, with specifically defined roles of male dominance and female subservience. These women are economically, culturally, legally, sexually and psychologically dependent on men.

(1) Women depend on men's wages. They perform a full-time, unpaid job, which is in fact socially useful and necessary for the capitalist system (as reflected in myths of Motherhood and the Sanctity of the Family), although it is not recognised as such. (This should not be taken to imply that housewives should be paid, as some feminists in the movement have demanded). Institutionalising individual housework (by introducing wages) would make women more enslaved and more isolated from social production. In some circumstances it would even be of great benefit to the capitalist system.

(2) They are culturally underdeveloped. Working-class girls generally receive less education than boys. As mothers and housewives they are tied to their kids, the washing, cleaning and shopping. They do not have the same opportunities for education and development as even working-class men.

(3) Women still do not have the same status legally as men despite the reforms that have been brought about in this sphere as well.

(4) Women are sexually oppressed: the principle of monogamy has been intended to bind women more closely than men. Their sexuality is exploited by the media and debased: strip clubs, advertising, hostesses (used more and more as sales promoters).

(5) Because of these factors women are bound psychologically to men, through insecurity and an inability to act independently. Women often do not think of themselves as human beings with minds of their own.

Women Alone

If women are unmarried but have children, they are faced with the same oppression at all levels, with the additional psychological and cultural oppression implied by the social stigma of being an "unsupported" mother. They are faced with the specific problems of:

- a. working and therefore having to find a baby-minder for their kids;
- b. not working and therefore being dependent on the State, and being spied upon by social security officials to ensure they do not "cohabit" with a man. In which case, women are no longer "unsupported", since the presence of a man in the house automatically means that a woman must be economically dependent on him.

Working Women

Working women are doubly oppressed: (a) at work; (b) at home. While doing the same amount of work per week as men, women are generally left with the work at home and the care of children. In addition, women are usually paid less than men for the same work. Despite the legal provisions of the equal pay act, the tendency is to classify "women's" work and "men's" work differently. Generally women are employed in low-paid service occupations (nurses, secretaries, shop-assistants, cleaners, etc.) which correspond to an extent to the traditional (bourgeois) role of women as the servants of men. Where women are in effect doing the same job as men, the title of the job is often different, and the wage lower; for example, men are called "draughtsmen", while women are "tracers".

Women often suffer from a lack of qualification which leads them into low-paid jobs. Because of the myth of inferiority and also the mystification of motherhood, women often themselves undervalue education, and this view is reinforced by society. However, when the needs of capitalism demand that women should be involved in production and not only in the home (e.g. in wartime), then the bourgeois ideology towards women is adapted to suit the objective situation. At the same time it must be recognised that a working woman is more economically independent from the man, and, being involved directly in social production is less isolated from the general struggle of the working class. This is a necessary step towards women's liberation, necessary but not sufficient, since oppression still exists on other levels.

As Marxists we must be primarily concerned with the main internal contradiction of society, that between exploiters and exploited. This means that the main core and leading force of the women's movement will be working women engaged in struggle, which in no way negates the vital and necessary organisation of housewives and women primarily in the home. Similarly, since we see the principle contradiction in this way, we do not regard either men or the institution of the family as the main obstacle to the liberation of women. There is no point in demanding the immediate abolition of the family in a situation where the family remains an integral part of a particular set of production relations. But, by rejecting their traditional role within the bourgeois family, women will be challenging an important part of the structure of bourgeois society and combatting one of the mainstays of bourgeois ideology.

11. The Need for a Separate but not Autonomous Movement

(1) A Separate Movement

The special oppression of women calls for special struggles and special organisation. It is vital that women should make propaganda on these issues, which are of particular concern to other women and especially to working class women who are doubly oppressed by capitalism. These struggles must be initiated, organised and led by women because men traditionally dominate most groups and parties on the left. In addition to making propaganda on women's struggle, any organisation of socialist women must develop a theoretical analysis of the woman question, based on a close understanding of the history of women's oppression and of the role of women in society today. This analysis should form the basis for planning activities and campaigns that will appeal to wide sections of women and bring them closer to an understanding of their own struggle and to socialism.

There are some women who maintain that there is no need for a separate women's movement at all, and that all women need to do is to join the revolutionary working class movement and hey presto when the socialist revolution is won, women's liberation will happen overnight.

Thus, in a Communist Party of Great Britain pamphlet by Rosemary Small we find:

As a result of this (i.e. socialism) people's attitudes will change: women will no longer be presented or thought of as inferior beings, and both men and women will change their ideas about superiority and inferiority. Thus socialism will help to bring true equality for women as well as legal equality.

(WOMEN - THE ROAD TO EQUALITY AND SOCIALISM, p.20)

According to the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist Leninist): The workers' party (i.e. the CPB(ML)) is the only organisation of any sort which is working for real equality of the sexes and an end to the special oppression of women under capitalist rule.

(WOMEN IN CLASS STRUGGLE, p.13)

Despite some correct analysis in this pamphlet, all this conclusion means in practical terms is "join the CPB(ML) and women's special oppression will be taken care of".

They have learnt nothing from the lessons of the past, particularly from the experience of women in the Soviet Union. We know that women in the Soviet Union still do two jobs (one at home, one at work), while men do one. As Marxist women we must try to understand why that happened in the Soviet Union, in order to avoid making similar mistakes in the future. The situation is a highly complex one to analyse, and is connected with the general question of the degeneration of the Soviet Union and the restoration of capitalism. Very generally we can say that the enormous primary problems facing the Soviet Union, notably its isolation and attacks from within and without, and the very real need for industrialisation, meant that many questions of vital importance in relation to the superstructure of society were relegated to a secondary position. Therefore the importance of women's liberation got lost and women's organisations were weakened and unable to struggle (if necessary against the incorrect policies of the Party) for full equality.

The main lesson to be learned is that women must at no time forget that their oppression is to be found not only at the economic level, but also at an ideological level. This is why the struggle will continue after a socialist revolution, and why only a special and to that extent "separate" organisation of women is capable of mobilising large numbers of women to fight and defeat this oppression.

In 1959 Ho Chi Minh, speaking as the leading member of a successful and experienced Communist Party engaged in building socialism, said:

...women should not wait until the directives of the government and the Party free them, but they must rely upon themselves and struggle. (Excerpt from A TALK AT A CADRES' MEETING DEBATING THE DRAFT LAW ON MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY)

(2) But not an Autonomous Movement

Although the women's movement must to this extent be a separate movement, this does not mean that it must be autonomous. Such a movement would have no hope of achieving its goals unless it were linked with the wider struggle of the working class to achieve socialism. The oppression of women is an integral part of capitalist society and will not be swept away until capitalism is. The experience of other socialist revolutions shows that the only force capable of leading the working class in the fight for socialism is a Communist Party, based on the concept of Lenin. Therefore the fight for women's liberation is inextricably linked to the revolutionary struggle of the working class.

Women in the movement who argue for an autonomous movement are in fact saying that men are the main enemy and not capitalism, a system based on inequality and oppression. To argue that men are the main enemy is to argue in sex, not in class, terms and to advocate that men must be overthrown and women put in the men's place.

We know that women's oppression is related very directly to class society, and that the complete liberation of women will not be achieved without a Socialist Revolution. Similarly, a Socialist Revolution is impossible without the full and equal participation of women, nor will socialism be built without women's liberation.

In this respect we can learn from the experience of the women of Vietnam and China (bearing in mind the differences in the objective realities of working women in Britain and other capitalist countries). These examples show very clearly that their fight for liberation and equality was not over after the revolutions of 1945 and 1949. On the contrary, it was more important than ever, and the women's organisations have played a central role by "relying on themselves" and not waiting for "the directives of the government and the Party".

The principal contradiction in this society is a class contradiction between the exploiters and the exploited; our aim is the overthrow of the exploiting classes by the exploited, and ultimately the establishment of a classless society. However, this struggle cannot be viewed in the abstract; one characteristic of class society is that the principal contradiction, between workers and capitalists, is reflected in various secondary contradictions "among the people"; there are forms of oppression which are specific to women, and to combat these a specific women's organisation is needed. If this organisation is to be effective in combating women's oppression, it must be linked to the general struggles of the working class and the development of a revolutionary party. It must in other words, be "separate but not autonomous".

Women's struggle must be waged at all levels of their oppression. In the trade unions women must fight for equal pay and conditions, they must fight for equal legal rights, they must fight for real equality in political organisations. It is vital to consider the specific problems of women at home and try to involve them in campaigns on these issues. Only in this way will they begin to develop a wider understanding of their everyday problems and see the links between them and the struggle for socialism. Only through such coordinated struggles will women be able to educate men and themselves, and to eradicate incorrect bourgeois ideas in the working class movement, so that women and men unite on a basis of equality to win in the common struggle for socialism. This can be achieved only with a separate organisation of women.

(London Group, Communist Federation of Britain)

Workshop 4. Report: Are Feminist Concepts necessarily Bourgeois and Idealist?

Papers/Notes: The Missing Link

Orientation of the Women's Liberation Movement

The Autonomy of the Women's Movement (Hackney Women's Group)

Why there is a need for a Separate but not Autonomous Women's Movement

The purpose of the workshop was a discussion of the nature of feminist concepts and of their theoretical relationship to the Marxist theory of class oppression. It began by looking at the distinction between 'autonomy' and 'separateness' which was raised in the Communist Federation of Britain's paper. However, this line of investigation was not greeted with enthusiasm and was, in fact, a non-starter.

The familiar problem of lack of preparation was evident and amongst those women who had given the subject some thought, there was a clash of views that resulted in stalemate. This antagonism was focussed around the two contradictions, that between capital and labour, and that between men and women. The workshop agreed that feminist concepts, such as sexism, male chauvinism, and sisterhood, had not grown out of the Marxist theory of class oppression, but some women argued that this theoretical autonomy from Marxism did not necessarily reduce feminist concepts to the 'bourgeois' and 'idealist'. But agreement on this was not reached. There were those women who argued that the contradiction between men and women should be subsumed within the contradiction between capital and labour, the strategic implications of this being that the revolutionary struggle should be immediately directed exclusively at the proletarian control of the means of production. Alternatively, there were other women, who, while they agreed with the necessity of this aim and who supported unreservedly such a strategy, argued that the revolutionary struggle was more diversified and therefore, there was ALSO, an autonomous women's struggle to be fought simultaneously. As the workshop could not agree that feminist concepts were in fact revolutionary, it did not arrive at a position to tackle the elusive link between feminist theory and the Marxist theory of class oppression, since such an exploration requires an understanding of the women's struggle as revolutionary, albeit distinct from, though related to, the proletarian class struggle.

Although the workshop had been initially conceived as a forum for theoretical discussion, it became bogged down in argument about the strategy of the Left and the relationship to that of the Women's Movement, in speculative anthropology, and was also subjected to strong individualist pressure for exclusive examination of one particular paper in its entirety. That theoretical discussion which did occur, took place only between a minority of the workshop.

Marion Dain

Workshop 6 Report: The Personal/Sexual/Collective Politics of Autonomy

Papers/Notes: The Missing Link

Other papers on Autonomy

The workshop was to be mainly based around my paper, 'The Missing Link'. Anne Scott and I had about three or four sessions discussing the workshop, and we decided to try and structure it quite carefully. We therefore divided the time (3 hours) up into three sections, to correspond with the areas discussed in the paper.

Anne was to make a short introductory statement - telling people how we suggested structuring things, and seeing if there were comments/criticisms. I was then to introduce the first section, summarise in 5 minutes the first section of the paper, and then raise points for discussion. Anne was to do the same for the second section, and then, depending on what had happened in the previous 2 hours, we were to try and take joint responsibility for the third and final section. The last section was least planned, because we thought it would be (might be) the most fluid in practice. As far as I remember it, we didn't discuss things like how we would conduct the discussions themselves, but perhaps that was because we wanted to leave that part of things fairly open.

The start went according to our plan; Anne said her bit, no-one objected to the structure we proposed, and I did a short summary of the first section of the paper, which was an attempted summary of three defined positions on autonomy existing in the movement (biological determinism/radical feminism; economic determinism - i.e. working as caucuses in Left groups; dual membership of a Left group and the Women's Movement). The discussion moved well, lots of people appeared to want to talk, and the workshop grew - more people arriving. After just over an hour I pointed out that if we were to go on to the second section (intended to be a more theoretical discussion) we would have to do so then. People on the whole didn't seem to want to stick to the original structure; the discussion was revolving round the question of the relationship of different Marxist-Feminist women to each other, both within and outside the women's movement; women from the Communist Party, International Socialists, International Marxist Group, Women's Liberation spoke, there was some discussion about what it meant politically if one's political practice was primarily in the Women's Movement, and how one related to other women whose political practice was related primarily to one of the male-dominated groups - and vice versa. It was not (I don't think) on the whole a very profound discussion, but it was active (one woman from Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign said where the hell were the Marxist women who had criticisms of the campaign, and what about the relationship of Marxist women in the movement to non-Marxist women in the Movement), and appeared to be quite frank in many ways. There seemed to be a bit of a resentment from women in left groups who thought they were being moralistically pressured to put their first political loyalties into the Women's Movement. The discussion started and kept coming back to the question of dual membership, but like other questions it wasn't really discussed in any depth.

So the entire workshop was an expansion of the first section; because in the concrete situation that was most urgent for the people in the workshop.

Comment

I had and have mixed feelings about the way the workshop went. Inevitably, I suppose, because we had spent some time planning, we had a (then) comprehensive picture of what could be covered in the time; perhaps too much for only three hours. So while I was disappointed that the paper as such received very little discussion, and that our 'plan' wasn't really tested, I did think that the discussion that happened was a positive beginning, and that the workshop decision to abandon our suggested plan was the right one for the workshop.

One of the reasons for this was the fact that I'm sure very few women had had time to

read the paper properly; there was a summary, but even that perhaps wouldn't have been enough. So if we had pursued our plan, the discussion of the paper would probably have been had by a minority of women in the know, with others as spectators. This way everyone felt involved in the issue, even though not everyone spoke.

This does raise the question of how workshops based on papers are structured. Personally I think that even if people have the papers a week or so beforehand, not everyone always has time to read and think properly before the workshop. I'm strongly in favour of having a paper distributed before hand (if possible) and being read at the workshop itself - as long as it's not too long - say no more than half an hour. I didn't read my paper, but we did decide it would be a good idea for each of us to summarise the section under discussion, so that everyone started off as equal as possible in terms of knowledge. There is so much material at conferences especially. And I don't think you can ever be SURE that everyone has read a paper. There's a lot of resistance to the idea of someone standing in front reading or speaking to large groups - fears of patronage, leadership. But if we're discussing something which has taken a long time to work out, it's the way the reading/discussion is structured that determines whether it is oppressive or not. For this reason I think that time for discussion should at least equal, if not be greater than, time for reading/presenting a paper; unlike, perhaps, the History Workshop sessions I've been to where there is usually very little time allowed for discussion - fifteen - twenty minutes. The answer perhaps is to arrange more workshops after conferences (such as the one's we're setting up in London), so that papers at conferences are a sort of gathering of ideas which one doesn't expect to be able to deal with there and then thoroughly.

The conduct of the discussion worked out a bit unevenly. Quite early on it was clear that some people were more articulate/more willing to speak than others. I suggested that we should try and choose as many different speakers as possible, and the workshop agreed. Anne and I both tried to keep the thread of the argument continuous, developing points that came up, though again we hadn't previously talked about how to do it. I suppose that really has to be a matter of practice - learning to concentrate, to pick out from what people say what is carrying the argument further, what is a diversion. Trying to judge when a 'diversion' is actually a new development, trying to guide a discussion without dominating it or limiting it to one's own interests. Some time during the workshop I realised that I had sort of 'taken over' giving people the right to speak, that they were catching my eye rather than Anne's. I asked Anne to stop me and take over a bit, and she did - but perhaps there it was a case of where things weren't planned (we hadn't thought it might need to be defined beforehand) one of us did dominate, and that was bad for both of us. So if I ever did it again, I'd suggest alternating making the choice of who was to speak between the two chairpeople.

I don't ever want to go to an unstructured discussion based on a paper again. My experience of that workshop was that two chairpeople was a good number; it was possible for us to confer during the workshop with a minimum of fuss. We tried to structure the discussion, rather than dominate it. I'm not sure how much we succeeded, but I found the experience fruitful. It was hard to do, as the workshop became so large and in a situation like this inevitably many people will end up as spectators. There simply isn't the time for everyone to participate.

perhaps a better set-up for a large workshop like this is to have a combination of formal/informal structure. Starting with a formal presentation - reading, an outline of what is to be discussed by the chairpeople. Then the group could split into two or three in the same room to have discussions where more people participate, though each group having someone in it to perform the guiding function. That way more people could participate, and this is, after all, only a slightly more formal (but actually more democratic, possibly) version of what has always happened in the women's movement.

Finally, if we believe that written papers, theoretical work, analysis, etc. are politically important, then we must commit ourselves to ways of discussing them which are structured and cohesive, even if the structure is changed in the middle. We have to make distinction between the learning process we are all involved in and the author-

itarian structures we are trying to depart from. I think that the workshops at Conway Hall were a very positive exploration in how to organise the knowledge and experience we already have - though I think the plenary sessions had different problems.

Micheline Wandor

Second Report from Workshop 6

It was difficult to know how to plan the workshop in advance because we had to make our own, sometimes arbitrary definitions of the sort of women who would be there and try and work out from an isolated situation what types of questions would be raised. I think this led us into a rather possessive idea of what we wanted the workshop to talk about so that if (as in fact happened) the workshop proceeded in reality differently from our assumed pattern then it became quite hard to be flexible without feeling disheartened or anti-climactic.

I felt that the discussions Micheline and I had before the workshop raised more issues that I wanted to pursue than the discussion in the workshop itself. The implications of this seem to be:

1. In the women's movement we still have to resolve the tensions of a large group - this can be anything above about three women or about twelve women depending on the type of meeting (the threshold for paranoia tends to vary according to whether it is a consciousness-raising, political study, or activity group, for example) - i.e. how to extract the positive from a large group beyond an emotional/personal response of sisterhood.
2. In a very small group one's personal sense of responsibility for discussion is usually more powerful and this means that it is likely that one will feel more involved in the discussion of a theoretical paper, action-decision or whatever and more committed to thinking creatively. For myself I tend to feel something of a spectator in workshops at conferences and say what I have to say about the subject afterwards in twos and threes.
3. The ideas which came alive before the workshop were very closely related to, the content of Micheline's paper. Given that the workshop itself didn't touch on the paper except as something that really deserved a lot of attention then I feel that the workshop discussion would not have been able really to explore the historical questions Micheline's paper goes into. I think the one-day workshop on the paper in December will help in this.

The Workshop itself

There were probably about eighty women in the workshop. Most women who talked had a lot of experience in the Women's Movement and a varying amount of experience in the left groups but I don't think I can remember many women speaking who had no previous contact with the organised Left. In fact this context suited me very well because I had originally wanted a workshop session on the subjective and structural relationship between Women's Liberation and the politics of the Left groups. I think the discussion we had in the workshop was generally anecdotal (probably too much so though this is not supposed to be a heavy put-down) and a bit like a speaking-bitterness time (there was some bitterness about the Left). I felt that the discussion of specific campaigns in terms of the attitude the Left has taken to Women's Liberation politics was the most constructive part of this aspect of the workshop - for example, one woman from Women's Abortion and Contraceptive Campaign spoke at length about the way in which she knew that various women in one of the left groups felt critical of what WACC was doing but never made the effort to enter into a debate with WACC in her area. But it was hard to know how to sustain that sort of momentum since the women in the workshop had

such diverse experience and wanted to raise a lot of points. We never got on to discussing the paper because our tight structure began to come loose towards the end of the first hour (we had divided the 3 hours up into a) different definitions of autonomy that have come out of the movement b) theoretical discussion of some aspects of the paper c) implications for a tactic of offensive autonomy) and a lot of women wanted to continue with the discussion about the Women's Movement and the Left that developed soon after the beginning of the workshop.

At the end of the workshop I felt both optimistic and pessimistic:- optimistic because a lot of women had spoken, and not solely women who are the most confident in the movement, and because there hadn't been as much evidence of mutual hostility between the Women's Movement and the Left as I have seen in other situations. I felt that a lot of women did feel strongly that we need to clarify a relationship between these two movements that can be mutually creative. I was a bit sad though that we hadn't begun to work out a practical strategy for the issues of autonomy that were raised, but maybe you shouldn't expect things to happen just because you plan them to happen. I think though that a discussion and sharing of experience like the one in our workshop needed to be extended as far as possible into what we can begin to do to act on our situation as Marxist-Feminists/Feminist-Marxists.

One thing that remains unresolved for me is the distinction between Marxist Feminism and Feminist Marxism. They can mean different things in practice as well as in theory. Possibly one of the paranoias operating in the workshop related to this, maybe some women were almost unconsciously deciding whether particular women who spoke could be seen as a Marxist first and a feminist second, or vice versa. This could be projection: on my part, in fact it probably is since I was aware of doing it from time to time myself. Somehow though we have to transcend this grading of ideologies because firstly they need each other and secondly they can create or exacerbate political polarisations.

In terms of the structure of the workshop I think that the energy Michelene and I put into working together before hand on the discussion did help to make the workshop come alive. I found it really important to know that there were two people responsible for the thing rather than just one neurotic trying not to be authoritarian. Since nobody objected to our description at the beginning of the workshop about how we thought the time could be divided it's hard to know whether there were silent resentments. I really think co-chairing has a fantastic amount of potential.

Ann Scott

AUTONOMYWorkshop 1. Report: Sexual Politics and the Autonomy of the Women's Movement

Papers/Notes: Sexual politics and the autonomy of the Women's Movement

Other papers on autonomy

The paper hadn't been distributed early enough for most of the hundred or so people there to have read it, so the writers of the paper distributed a leaflet which suggested questions for discussion, and one of the sisters who had written the paper summarized its main arguments.

There was a bit of general discussion, but we soon decided that we couldn't talk about sexuality properly in such a large group, so the workshop split into three for the rest of the morning.

In each of the three groups the discussion was very wide-ranging, and the value of the workshops was more in the questions opened rather than anything thoroughly worked out. So it is probably best first to list some of these questions and problems here, though this doesn't give a sense of the personal experience and stories that were an important part of some of the talking that went on, and which may have actually been more valuable:

How could women relate their actual sexual relationships with men practically to women's liberation ideas about the politics of the family? This seemed hard because of the privatisation of sex and love.

How could it be something that involved the men politically, and not just personally, through their having a girl friend in Women's Liberation?

Since that is something for men to work out, what should we do in the meantime? Some of the women there had found that their bringing Women's Liberation ideas home had made their men sexually anxious and badly affected them and yet there didn't seem any way this might not be treated as a personal problem since there was no way of taking it outside the couple, especially for the man. It seemed a big problem for the idea of sexual politics that men often relate as individuals to the women's movement.

Should we look to Freud for theories of sexuality? Or if not, what was the practice out of which we would make our own theory?

How were the emotional relationships in the family tied up with the family's role in capitalist consumption?

And how did the individualism in the family, coming from its role as individualised unit of consumption affect the collective bonds of the factory, militate against strikes? How did women's place in the family affect her political consciousness?

Miriam Gluxman
Sue Vickery
Barbara Miller

PAPERS FROM THE



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& SOCIALISM
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London 22/23 September 1973

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